

WAR ON CRITICS

Theodore L. Shaw



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by

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by the author

"The Fatigue Pattern"

WAR ON CRITICS

THEODORE L. SHAW



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By the Same Author
ART RECONSTRUCTED
ART'S ENDURANCE

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Chapter I

INDECISIVE CONFLICT

THERE have been seven-year, thirty-year and hundred-year wars; wars waged by words and by force of arms; wars of the Roses, of the Guelfs and the Ghibellines; wars fought for thrones, for women, for vanity, for no distinguishable objectives whatever, for bread, for a jest, or out of mere boredom. But so far as I know, no other conflict resembles the one in a late phase of which I now find myself engaged — a conflict which has been continuously active for over two thousand years and, most extraordinary of all, a conflict in which one combatant has always and soundly been beaten — and yet never gives up.

The war I am referring to, of course, is that of mankind in general against Critics, and the side which is so peculiarly vulnerable and yet somehow survives is that of the critics.

They are push-overs — unfailingly and notoriously. An innocent can topple them with one sincere word, so far as validity of thought is concerned. Ideologically they are bankrupt, rationally they haven't a leg to stand on, as they themselves well know; and yet they continue their slippery existences and befuddle and frustrate us with their megalomaniac pronouncements, their Tartuffian sanctimonies, their Cheshire grins and cackles. For some reason, when it comes to the decisive act — when the time arrives to deliver the death-blow — our resolution fails and we let them off.

To my way of thinking this unending tolerance of incompetents is undesirable and it will be the endeavor of this book to spark up the hostilities, cause a more ruthless waging of the war and perhaps thus bring their literary careers to an end.

Lest it be thought that I am unduly optimistic in expecting with a single volume to deal the coup de grâce to these fellows — no matter how debilitated their state — I can only say that I hope to accomplish it not by any greater than ordinary skill but by revealing them in their true rather than their fancied characters. The customary impression of them — in the lull between battles, at least — is that although erratic, conceited and usually wrong they are sincerely trying to do the best they can in what they consider to be an honest cause. As I shall demonstrate, they are not that at all, but outright aesthetic criminals, quite aware of the complete fraudulence of their mode of life, deliberately bamboozling us for the benefit of their own pocket-books and to the injury of our health and well-being and laughing up their sleeves at us while doing so. A conviction such as that, if widely enough held, might accomplish a great deal.

And at this point may I ask you not to be disturbed by the somewhat unphilosophical tone which pervades these pages. It is unphilosophical two ways; first in the absence of the philosopher's traditional calm and sobriety — which clearly would be inappropriate to my purpose; and second in the philosophically unorthodox — even unprofessional — language which it employs. This latter departure I justify because I regard philosophy's jurisdiction over art (and a book on art) to be not nearly so absolute as it is ordinarily considered — in fact of very minor force.

Philosophy, as I see it, is most effective in its usually neutral — even negative — role, where it analyzes the pros and cons of varying theories but refrains from rendering positive verdicts as to their soundness. As soon as it goes beyond that and attempts to dictate precise action it has an unfortunate proneness — almost compulsion — to disorganize whatever it touches.

For example, consider what would happen to our notions of right and wrong and the control of crime if we should allow philosophy's abstractions on the subject — as expressed in Ethics — to determine our policy. We should simply have no policy whatever. No man would be punished for any crime, no matter how iniquitous, because according to philosophy, we could not know whether it was *his* crime, or his parents' crime, or society's crime, or nature's crime or that it was a crime at all. And though criminals would be well enough off with such a situation it obviously wouldn't do for the rest of us. So we have been compelled to work out our own *practical* system of right and wrong, independently of philosophy's. And on the whole it has worked out satisfactorily enough.

Unfortunately, however, we were not equally self-reliant and determined in the case of art and aesthetics. The criminals in that field (critics, that is) were able somehow to get the better of us. They managed to drag Philosophy out of its proper niche as a well-meaning but not very practical mentor or Dutch Uncle and set it up (with all its irresolutions and passings of the buck) as the final authority on art. Once that was accomplished, of course, they could commit whatever aesthetic sins, misdemeanors and outright depravities chanced to suit their moods. When caught in a particularly atrocious one, they simply produced a sonorous passage from Plato, Epicurus or Spinoza and that absolved them.

In such circumstances only one outcome has naturally been possible — the gradual growth of aesthetics, through the generations, to a swindle of truly frightening magnitude. It operates with an equipment and personnel hardly smaller than those of railroading or the post-office department and is able not only to victimize entire classes, societies and races but to inflict intellectual punishments upon insubordinate creative artists in comparison with which the brutalities of racketeering seem wishy-washy.

I wish there were some brief descriptive term by which its evils could be fully pictured. But for lack of one I shall name it White-Feather Aesthetics. At least this reveals the fact that cowardice is its generative force — the cowardice of the critics who promulgated it — and our cowardice in letting them get away with it.

Now there is a way to escape this muddled and degrading tyranny, as I shall point out shortly, but it is not through patience and tolerance — quite the contrary.

Chapter II

CRIMES OF WHITE-FEATHER AESTHETICS

WHEN I accuse critics of being aesthetic criminals the reader very naturally expects two things of me: first, that I prove the existence of the crimes and second, that I prove the crimes to be serious enough to be worth bothering about. I can do both; the first very rapidly and easily, the second more slowly and arduously — since I shall there find stronger prejudices and preconceptions to overcome — but eventually even more convincingly.

To demonstrate the existence of the crimes is easy because nearly everybody has had personal experiences of them and because vast quantities of them have been gathered into books devoted especially to the subject. A visit to the public library accordingly will supply whatever corroboration is needed, if any.

All that I shall attempt at this early page, therefore, is to give you a few samples of these crimes in various flavors or classifications of themselves, hoping that you will be able, by mentally blending them together, to remind yourself of the general taste of the whole. The samples chance to appertain to Literature, but that is merely because such samples can be more conveniently cited. Corresponding culpabilities are available in Music, Painting, Architecture or any other art you might care to mention.

And remember, I am not attempting now to shock you with these samples. If they seem to be merely “annoy-

ing" or "exasperating", that will have to do, for the present. There are longer, subtler and much more noxious ones, but I have not space to quote them here. And after all, it is the cumulative effect that counts. It is the basic malignance, of which they (like a cough or a rash) are merely the surface symptoms, that will tell the final outcome. Criticism's crimes find their counterparts not in the dagger-thrust or the blast of the machine gun but in the prolonged incarceration in the solitary cell or the slow poisoning by arsenic.

One widely-committed type can appropriately be named *Atom-Bombism*. Critics seem to take a particular joy in perpetrating this one — perhaps because of its Arsene Lupin brass and effrontery. It is characterized by the pretense that no matter how small the fragments into which art may be divided each one retains the emotional power of the whole. A motif in music, a tiny segment of a painting, a phrase out of a book have the same infinite potentiality of beauty as the entire composition.

For example, of Shakespeare's seemingly routine line, "I am dying, Egypt, dying," George Saintsbury remarks, "Those ineffable penultimate words . . . which attain the absolute perfection of pathos in verbal music."

And Logan Pearsall Smith states: —

"Most of all I envy the octogenarian poet (Edmond Waller) who joined three words *Go, Lovely Rose* so happily together that he left his name to float down through time on the wings of a phrase and a flower."*

I could quote a hundred similar assertions, made by a hundred critics — and by no means minor critics either: and yet how manifestly ridiculous they are. One

*These two quotations and a number of others I have used were derived from Mr. Huntington Cairns' illuminating volume, *The Limits of Art*.

might as well declare mauve and burnt orange, say, to be the most beautiful of all color combinations, or GBD the loveliest chord in music. An artist must work further away from the mere elements of his craft — he must progress deeper into complexity — before his creations can have a sufficient resistance to reiteration to retain their attraction for more than a negligible period of time; and whether the critic fails to realize this fact, or realizes it and chooses to ignore it in order to say something arresting, in either case he obviously is misleading his readers.

And since I have used the phrase *resistance to reiteration*, perhaps I should explain here that this book frankly defines beauty in what is usually accepted as its "natural" meaning — namely the *capacity to cause pleasure* — and not in any of its more mystic meanings. Beauty is something, therefore, of which man eventually tires, no matter how much he might wish he didn't. A preliminary acceptance of this fact makes the present chapter more intelligible. Next, *Defeatism*.

Aesthetic crimes in this category are of two types. First, there are crimes which are a mixture of self-complacency and apathy, reminiscent of the lazy man's allegations that everything has been done in the world and no opportunities for achievement still remain.

Illustrative of these are T. S. Eliot's describing of an excerpt from Dante as the "highest point that poetry has ever reached or ever can reach"; Edmund Gosse's declaration that Lovelace's poem, *Lucasta*, "contains no line or part of a line that could by any possibility be improved" and F. W. H. Myers' perhaps even more reckless dictum, that "no words that man can any more set side by side can ever affect the mind again like some of the great passages of Homer".

Here also I could quote a multitude of similar remarks; nevertheless again, how ridiculous they are! It could with equal validity be declared that the pyramids were "perfection" and could never be improved upon simply because of their approximation to a geometric ideal.

And also how damaging and injurious to art they are. Art is pictured not as a force which inspirits and liberates man, but as a rigid and constrictive prison from which he can never escape, but can only regard with growing horror the wall of "perfection" which his ancestors have surrounded him with.

And yet could such statements be philosophically justified? Well enough to white-wash critics, yes; on their surfaces, anyhow. And allow me to demonstrate with a so-called philosophic proof that a perfect being and perfection exist*, as follows: "Now if we consider the very meaning of this notion, we find that what it refers to *must exist*. For by an absolutely perfect being we mean one that is complete or possesses all possible properties; and this includes the property of existence. The idea of absolute perfection being non-existent is self-contradictory; for not to exist is not to be absolutely perfect"!!! By such expedients you can prove anything.

The second type of defeatism includes crimes of a less positive (but more revealing) kind, in that they are rather acquiescences in crimes than commissions of them. H. L. Mencken writes: "all the ideas of aesthetics that I am familiar with, and in particular all that I announce most vociferously, seem to contain a core of quite obvious nonsense. I thus try to avoid cherishing them too lovingly, and it always gives me a shiver to see anyone gobble

*from *Philosophy: An Introduction*, by Randall and Buchler; characterized as possessing superficial plausibility.

them at one gulp"; T. S. Eliot frankly complains that "the less you know and like the easier to frame aesthetic laws" and Huntington Cairns* admits that "the first task that confronts literary criticism, if it wishes to correct its present chaotic condition, is to determine whether it can give valid judgments or not"; and from the context of his article it seems that Mr. Cairns is doubtful if it can do so.

There is a certain tone here of despair and even of guilt which reminds one of the prophetic comment ascribed to Madame Pompadour just before the French Revolution: "after us the deluge".

Although I appreciate these honester than usual confessions as a corroboration of what I have already said — namely that White-Feather Aesthetics is not an erroneous theory which critics chance honestly to be taken in by, but an out-and-out deception of whose nature the insiders are well aware — nevertheless I cannot accept the implication that nothing can be done about it. Aesthetics may simply be due — even overdue — for its own French Revolution, and these three critics might be regarded as incipient Robespierres, Murats or Dantons — not quite consummated.

Now *Band-Wagonism*. Once establish an artist as a world-genius, and every first- second- or third-rate critic feels that somewhere, somehow, he must deliver his tribute to him, no matter how affectedly or far-fetchedly.

For example, accompanying a lock of Stella's hair, Jonathan Swift, after his death, was found to have written the words, *Only a woman's hair*; and the incident is characterized by George Saintsbury as

*In *Introduction to Lectures in Criticism*.

"The riddle of the painful earth in one of its forms expressed more poignantly and finally than it has been by any uninspired human being except Shakespeare."

That there is a certain pathos in Swift's phrase I shall not question, though no more, it seems to me, than can frequently be found in the columns of our daily newspaper, in the captions under photographs of accidents or disaster, in suicide notes, in almost any recounting of touching or tragic events. What I wish especially to point out, however, is how the critic has twisted a relatively minor incident into an excuse for delivering — within one short sentence — three obeisances, so to speak, to the accepted masters of literature, first to Swift, next — by the use of the word *inspired* — to the authors of the old and new testaments and last to Shakespeare.

How insufferably obsequious and rank-conscious the whole thing is! How it smacks of state department protocol and rules of precedence or of the new owner of the manor receiving the due bows and curtsies, in the proper order, from the butler, the first, second and third chamber maids and the scullery girl.

Another example of this extremely prevalent tendency is illustrated in the following rhapsody by which Mr. Middleton Murry supports the thesis implied in his essay on "A Neglected Heroine of Shakespeare":—

"Virgilia, Coriolanus' wife, though she is present throughout the whole of four scenes, speaks barely a hundred words. But a sudden, direct light is cast upon her by a phrase which takes our breaths with beauty, when Coriolanus welcomes her on his triumphant return from Corioli as 'My gracious silence!' Magical words! They give a miraculous substance to our fleeting, fading glimpses of a lovely vision which seems to tremble away from the clash of arms and

pride that reverberates through the play. Behind the haughty warrior and his Amazonian mother, behind the vehement speech of this double Lucifer, the exquisite, timid spirit of Virgilia shrinks out of sight into the haven of her quiet home. One can almost hear the faint click of the door behind her as it shuts her from the noise of brawling tongues. Yet in her presence and in the memory of her presence, Coriolanus becomes another and a different being. It is true we may listen in vain for other words so tender as 'My gracious silence!' from his lips. A man who has one love alone finds only one such phrase in a lifetime."

I do not ask you to share the repugnance with which I contemplate this dissertation. If I did, I should be falling victim to the same fallacy which it is a purpose of this book to explode — namely that there is any one inevitable and proper response to individual art works. I can only say that I consider the pressure of tradition by which critics feel compelled to perform periodic devotions and genuflections before Homer, Shakespeare, Michael Angelo, Beethoven and their like, out of mere duty and ceremony — as Messrs. Murry and Saintsbury so manifestly have — and without the spontaneity which at least lends some slight justification to the acts, can be observed only with extreme apprehension, if not actual disgust.

Hystericalism. The crimes in this category are partly our own fault. If we allow critics to utter any absurdities they wish and yet go scot-free, can we blame them if they reward us for our weakness by uttering still sillier ones? It becomes a romp, a lark, a frolic to see who can kick his heels the highest and get away with the greatest nonsensicality. Most of the samples I have already cited illustrate how widely critics are infected with this mania

for showing off. I cannot conceive of critics going into emotional frenzies over such phrases as "I am dying, Egypt, dying", or "Go, lovely rose", which clearly could pass unnoticed in almost any narrative passage, unless this spirit of irresponsibility were strongly permeating the atmosphere about them. I cannot conceive of anybody venturing that unbelievably reckless last sentence in Mr. Murry's comment: "a man who has one love alone finds only one such phrase in a lifetime", unless in addition to the immunity conferred on him by Shakespeare's name he had also observed, in a thousand cases as bad as his own, or worse, our complete incapacity to express and implement our resentment.

Here is another illustration:

Of the following extract from "Book of Common Prayer" *But no man may deliver his brother, nor make agreement unto God for him*: A. E. Housman writes "That is to me poetry so moving that I can hardly keep my voice steady in reading it".

Or still again, examine this supposed "test of poetry" taken from one of Emily Dickinson's letters:—

"If I read a book and it makes my body so cold no fire can ever warm me, I know that it is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that is poetry. These are the only ways I know it. Is there *any other way*?"

It might be imagined, from the apparent approbation with which this is quoted by a contemporary critic*, and by the general awe with which most ardent young poets regard it, that it is valid. Actually it is nothing but another highly misleading emotional explosion.

*Van Wyck Brooks in *A Chilmark Miscellany*. Similar tests of "poetry" have been given by others. Joseph Joubert defines poetry as *that which transports*.

Let us suppose that there is a certain poem, which would ordinarily have been destined to have exactly the powerful impact upon Miss Dickinson which she recounted. Could that impact have been prevented? Easily; and by any one of a dozen expedients — including the very simple expedient of frequently quoting to Miss Dickinson in advance one or two appropriately selected lines from the poem, and outlining its general substance and mood. The poem would have been unaltered; its “beauty”, in the sense in which critics use the word, would have been exactly the same, but its impact upon Miss Dickinson would have been very notably subdued — simply because it had been spread thin, so to speak, over several occasions, instead of concentrated upon the moment when it was read complete and with unjaded mind. By one procedure, the poem would have been adjudged by Miss Dickinson as poetry and by the other procedure it would not have been so adjudged. In other words, an evaluation exactly similar to those which crowd critical articles — exactly similar to those by which the entire art of criticism is supposedly sustained — has been anteriorly cancelled by the merest accident, by a chance occurrence of a kind which could with equal likelihood have altered the pleasurability of any art work in existence.

Last, *Immortalism*.

One of the most amazing things in the world is the complete composure — even enthusiasm — with which critics commit aesthetic crimes of this kind. Seemingly without the faintest qualm or misgiving they yearly, monthly, daily, pronounce this, that or the other art work to be immortal or timeless or of eternal merit. Whether they do so to demonstrate that a “minor” concept such as the infinity of time cannot intimidate them,

or not to be outdone by their fellow critics, or to make the asinine seem sensible by a fury of reiterating it, or out of a mere urge to shake their fists at God for making them mortals, I cannot say. I can only watch the flood of their atrocities roll on and on and wonder how the rest of us have managed to stand up to it as long as we have. And I beg that you do not attempt to palliate their offences by asserting that such statements are merely "innocent hyperbole", supposed to be taken figuratively; or that the "better critics" are not guilty of such naivete. It's not so. Men whose biographies occupy from one to ten pages in the encyclopedia are as culpable as the nobodies. You have only to make an unbiased examination to see that Immortalism permeates White-Feather Aesthetics at every level of proficiency from top to bottom. It may be that some of the adroiter critics have avoided outright and unqualified allegations of any art work's eternal beauty. But if so, it has only been out of slyness, and not from a repudiation of immortalism. It means only that they have gone underground with it.

Allow me to illustrate by a few comments which I believe you will concede as being very much in the ordinary run, and not hand-picked to suit my needs.

Eric Bentley, in the periodical *Scrutiny*, says, "While literary people in general waited till recently to discover that Lawrence was great and Aldous Huxley is not great, 'Scrutiny' made the correct appraisals from the start."

F. R. Leavis, in an article about Matthew Arnold, writes "But what has to be stressed is Arnold's relative valuation of the great romantics: Wordsworth he put first, then Byron (and for the right reasons), then Keats and last Shelley."

Now it happens that both these excerpts are strongly

tainted with the pretensions and egotisms which have been so noticeable in most of the other samples I have exhibited. What an exasperating smugness we feel in that one word "correct", from the first quotation, and how those five parenthesized words "and for the right reasons", from the second, smack of the book of etiquette and of the coterie of exquisites who might be imagined as bringing its precepts up to date. But that is not the point at this time. What I wish to call to your attention is that although there is no assertion here that any one of the authors mentioned is immortal, yet the doctrine of immortalism is there nevertheless, because the *relationships between the authors* are immortal, which amounts to the same thing. Lawrence and Huxley, at least in the opinions of the critics, are not going to exchange places every year, decade or century, and neither are Byron, Keats and Shelley. Their artistic merits in comparison with each other are permanently established.

In other words as soon as a critic compares artists, and places one definitely above or below another, he is right back again in immortalism — and in its absurdities — whether he knows it or not.

Now I don't think it is necessary to point out that this allegation of the betterness of one art work to another is latent in practically every line of White-Feather Aesthetics. "Dante is a classic and Blake only a poet of genius", asserts T. S. Eliot; "Forster is an artist and Shaw is not", announces Cyril Connolly. Coventry Patmore chooses for us "probably the very finest lyric in the English language." Henri Peyre, "perhaps the most beautiful single sonnet", Samuel Johnson the "noblest ode", Michael Monahan the "loveliest poem of eight lines in the literature of the world".

To see one of Courbet's works, says Frank Jewett Mather Jr., "after viewing a Meissonier, a Bouguereau, a Cabanel or a Jules Breton is like coming out of a suffocating room into the open air."

Malcolm Cowley asserts: "The best selling novels of the new era — like *Captain from Castile* and *The Black Rose* — were almost on the same literary level as those of the period from 1900 to 1905, on the average they were a little better than *Freckles*, a little worse than Winston Churchill's *The Crisis*."

And so on, to infinity. Everything has its proper place in hierarchy of beauty or of artistic merit and it must stay there. If *Cloister and the Hearth*, at Number 4000, is just above *Mademoiselle de Maupin*, at Number 4001, that relation has to continue indefinitely except for the adjustments needed to make room for new art works.

And do not accuse me, either, of unduly stressing an issue, and destroying a principle by carrying it to extremes. I am not doing so. I am simply exposing the crimes of White-Feather Aesthetics. If they are there, they are there.

Perhaps these exhibitionisms and hysterias, these recountings of their losses of breath and unsteady voices seem to you to be among the necessary evils which go with criticism. But they are not. They are the evils only of the kind of criticism critics have built *for their own benefit and against ours*.

Critics are our employees. We furnish the money for the books they write and for the periodicals to which they contribute. Consequently we would seem to be entitled to something in exchange that would be useful *specifically to us*. To be significant, their feelings, no matter how strong, must have some recurrent or formal application to a more than negligible number of other

persons; they must demonstrate the existence of a graph or trend of feeling; or at least the prospects of such a graph in the future. And above all, they must do much more than furnish a pretext for magniloquence, a chance to demonstrate the critic's supposed inhabiting of some ethereal domain of sensitivity in which those other grosser beings who unfortunately must be conceded as sharing with him the appellation of man would nevertheless be as imparticipant as eunuchs in Cythera.

This immortalism — this error as to the stability of beauty's effect — permeates and confuses all literature — even fiction. George Meredith, in order to emphasize the dangerous charm of his heroine, Diana of the Crossways, writes: —

“Beauty is rare; luckily is it rare, or, judging from its effect on men, and the very stoutest of them, our world would be internally a more distracted planet than we see, to the perversion of business, courtesy, rights of property, and the rest.”

The ineptitude of this comment is almost incredible. To believe that by doubling, say, the beauty of women we should double men's passion for them and thereby bring about a “perversion of business”, and convert the world into an inferno of “discourtesy”, is as silly as to believe that by doubling the amount of currency in circulation we should all be twice as rich, or that if all the fiddles in the world were Stradivarius-made, violin playing would be always more enjoyable, or that by wearing rose-colored glasses we could make the view out our window permanently more enjoyable. There might be a wave of astonishment at the sudden redder lips, more sparkling eyes, straighter noses, more symmetrically-shaped bodies by which men would thus find themselves surrounded, but within the month not so much as a ripple

of it would remain and men would accept this new level of loveliness with exactly the same varying degrees of fortitude and lack of it as had previously prevailed. The "rights of property" would not in the slightest degree be reduced, I can assure you.

Even the usually more objective Havelock Ellis falls victim to the same fallacy when he says:

"The most obviously beautiful things in the world are birds and flowers and the stones we call precious."

Why he didn't bring in the evening star, a young lady playing the harp, and a snow-crystal, I don't know. They certainly would seem to deserve mention at that level of sophistication.

All these things which critics call "obviously beautiful" are simply things which are in *insufficient supply*. If the world were a solid mass of birds, flowers and precious stones, if all women in the world were duplications of that one woman whom we now rate the loveliest, this notion of the inherent charm of such things would burst like the bubble it is.

And if you have ever explored a "third-rate" art gallery — one which contains a large stock of original oil paintings in massive gold frames selling for twenty-five or fifty dollars and up — you will doubtless have seen a considerable quantity created by artists who have unfortunately been duped by this shabby dogma. In a sense they act logically enough. If flowers are "obviously beautiful", then it follows, they say to themselves, that a painting depicting flowers must *also* be beautiful, and the more flowers they can put in, the more beautiful it should be. Yet what is the result? Only that in spite of their being guided by Havelock Ellis's tenet they have nevertheless produced pictures of a triteness and bana-

lity so overpowering that Ellis himself, I am sure, would have shrunk from them with horror.

The first critic in history who called an art work immortal can perhaps be complimented for propounding an amusing and suggestive paradox, but I doubt that he would be pleased if he could look down upon us now and see how his successors have inflated his innocent sally into a philosophical octopus that is strangling us into mental impotence.

The question now presents itself as to why such polutions and corruptions are tolerated in criticism. Is it because criticism is so "personal" an affair? Not at all, as I shall show later. Is it because they are only occasional. No, but for exactly the opposite reason — that they are so numerous, so all-pervading that we have become callous to them, that we assume their inevitability, as it were, like fleas on a dog.

We take it for granted that criticism doesn't make sense — that it *can't* make sense — that it must always be half an extravaganza and half a religion, in one moment a stage for super-aesthetes to strut and attitudinize upon and in the next a temple for pedants to announce dogmas within, which must be accepted not from reason but from faith. Yet it is exactly through that spirit of hopelessness and capitulation that we have made our mistake.

Criticism *can* make sense provided that we take hold *personally* and demand that it humanize itself and operate for *our* benefit instead of for that of its present purveyors. We must positively insist — and even decree — that there are absurdities which are *absurdities in themselves*, de facto, and cannot be converted into rationalities by quoting passages from Aristotle, Schopenhauer or Hegel, however erudite; any more than the

deeds of Messalina, Jack the Ripper or Lizzie Borden can be transformed into acts of virtue by philosophy's inability to agree on a precise definition of evil. It can be done, but certainly not by the urbane and affable means which have been used in the past. There have been attacks on criticism before — myriads of them — as I have already said. But they have resembled pillow fights more than purposeful battlings. There has been no ferocity nor desperation in them. Charles Lamb, Joseph Addison and Lord Chesterfield would have been charmed by the knightliness and correctitude of the contending. Mars, Kublai Khan, Voltaire, J. P. Morgan and Jack Dempsey would have walked out in disgust.

You don't vanquish bullies nor deflate charlatans with argument and reasoning. You smite them where it hurts. You produce tremor in their knees and swooning in their cerebrums by the force and multiplicity of your blows.

To defeat White-Feather aesthetics you must bring actual pain and suffering to its practitioners. Your chivalries, your scholarly tolerances, your giving the devil his due are that on which its exponents thrive. The never-ending nonsensicalities, perversions and quibbles which they have been promulgating must instantly and ruthlessly be slapped down — not shrugged off as inconsequential.

Obviously the first step in such a campaign is to prevent these aesthetic brigands from putting art in their pockets and walking away with it, out of our reach, as if nobody else were concerned. Art is a common property, a common need, and an appurtenance neither of the prodigy, the poseur, the smarty, the uplifter nor the dilettante.

A chief way in which they fool us as I have already remarked, is by setting up a series of philosophical

bogies which will devour us if we don't watch out; they, the critics, being our sole protection from these monsters, of course. In fact, it is supposedly because of the extreme dangerousness of them that the critics are sometimes compelled to stretch facts a bit. They do not quibble and evade for the *fun* of it, even if it seems that way. They do not spout imbecilities because they *prefer* them but because if they didn't, we beginners, whose right-thinking they must guard at any sacrifice, might fall victims to *Materialism*, or to *Relativism* or to the *Qualitative-Quantitative Theory of Art* or to *Hedonism* or to some other similar vampire doctrine.

Once allow such paganisms to get a foot within art's door, they tell us, and we will find ourselves in a state of complete and hopeless anarchy.

I do not propose to demonstrate here the comparative innocuance of these bogies. I have done that on a later page. Actually, they are disturbing in about the same degree as the fact that the whale and the bat are mammals, instead of what they more logically should be, might be disturbing to zoologists in their process of classifying the species — no more so.

And if it seem to you that these charges are exaggerated when we consider the fame and authority of those to whom they apply I can merely say that you underestimate, I believe, the compromises with truth which men will make for their own comfort or security, out of loyalty to their colleagues or from downright fear of tearing down ancient credences. Criticism is the only one of the arts which is being conducted today in practically the same way as centuries ago. We have modern art, modern music, modern poetry, drama and fiction — tremendously altered from previous traditions — but no modern criticism. I have shown you signs of restiveness

in the ranks, it is true, even a growing disgust among the critics themselves — but no open and all-out revolts. Examine for instance this sentence from William Empson's otherwise very penetrating book, 'Seven Types of Ambiguity':

"A first-rate wine taster may only taste small amounts of wine, for fear of disturbing his palate, and I dare say it would really be unwise for an appreciative critic to use his intelligence too freely".

Now I am unable to draw any other conclusion from those words than that *inside his own mind*, Mr. Empson has clearly perceived the complete invalidity of immortalism and of the criticism it pervades. For manifestly he is declaring that the beauties whose endurance critics so persistently emphasize are actually created only by an artificial renunciation of savoring them, akin to the hunger which the gourmand — anticipating a well-cooked supper — might intensify by going without lunch.

It is a procedure comparable to forbidding young people to see an eclipse of the moon in order that they should forever retain their freshness of interest in it; or to denying them a visit to the zoo for fear that the giraffe's or zebra's fascination for them would thereby be impaired, or to removing them from too long a contemplation of a supposed "masterpiece" of painting lest some other "less meritorious" picture should gain undue attraction out of its mere supplying a relief to the first one. Can beauties be said to endure if they endure only through artificial abstentions of perceiving them?

And if Mr. Empson has perceived this illogicality in immortalism, why doesn't he acknowledge it openly and take the consequences? Why does he let out merely a veiled hint of how his conscience hurts him and then for the rest of his book relapse into the old rut?

It is this sort of thing that exactly exemplifies the nullity and self-defeat of a deceitfully founded occupation. Each truth the critic tells exposes automatically an untruth elsewhere. If in an unfortunate impulse of candor (as in the above instance) he admits the obvious fact that a critic's taste "tires" he simultaneously concedes the impermanence of the critic's judgment. It is valid only when the critic is untired — and concomitantly it is valid to his reader only when the reader is untired. And yet a critic is manifestly always tired of *some* art works, is he not? In fact, it is through the process of tiring that he *becomes* a critic. Only by experiencing an immense quantity of those art works which constitute his specialty — only by *disturbing his palate*, that is — can he qualify himself. — He is a blasé man — essentially, inevitably; and his fatigues are that which are speaking for him, not his "good taste."

I trust this makes it clear that if an enemy of White Feather aesthetics permits himself to be drawn into what might be termed amiable discussion with his opponent — doing him the courtesy of talking in the jargon and tradition which that aesthetic has constructed — he will soon find himself tangled in a verbosity from which there is no escape.

So instead let us attempt to establish, (beginning in my next chapter) what I hope can without exaggeration be termed FACTUAL AESTHETICS; and not accept any fantasy-words in it whatever — but only words which can be exactly defined. And permit me to assure you in advance that it is not my purpose to promote simply another brand of aesthetics, which will end by demanding from you the swallowing of doctrines and tenets of a different flavor but with the same eventual indigestibility as those you are asked to discard. Factual

aesthetics tends, on the contrary, to a practicality which, if anything, seems an over-practicality — which demands such a repudiation of gauderies and faiths, such a calling of spades, spades, as to possess, at least to the tender-minded, a certain inaptness to so colorful, spectacular and ornamental a concept as art usually is supposed to be. And it offers at least a partial and probably sufficient escape, I think, from the excess of philosophy, which with the selfish concurrence of critics, has been transforming aesthetics into a kind of frustrated and farcical merry-go-round.

Chapter III

SECRET AFFAIR WITH PLEASURE

HAVING so strongly emphasized the practicality of what I call Factual Aesthetics, it is obvious that there is only one conceivable way that I can define beauty, namely as Pleasurability, or, if you prefer, the capacity to confer pleasure. And of course, least of all could I envisage it as *Absolute Beauty* or in any one of the other catch concepts which have been invented for purposes of mystification. The thus defining of it is not new. Students first suggested it centuries ago, when it was still permissible to be direct. It is the natural, the candid, the straight-forward definition.

I do not know of any "ordinary" man (outside of academic circles) who does not concede this fact. If an art work does not now or cannot later give him (or some other person) pleasure, he could not conceive of its possessing beauty. The two words are necessarily and inexorably tied together and nothing can separate them.

For the critic the situation is the same in one way but very different in another. Perhaps I can best explain this by saying that with him the union of the two words, though there, is not open and acknowledged but is seen as a kind of illicit liaison which must be concealed and kept in the background in order not to disturb aesthetic decorum. In fact, keeping the secret has become as much an element of professional technique for him, as has, in the case of the stage magician, the airy chatter by which

he draws your attention elsewhere while he prepares to take the bowl of gold-fish from his coat-tails. It is a part of the business; and if it seems unbelievable that so impossible a policy could be habitually maintained you have only to give a glance or two at criticism, as it is being furnished us, to convince yourself that I am right. As I have already said criticism's hypocrisies are not well hidden. So sure of our subservience are its purveyors that the merest gloss over them, they have come to think, is enough to keep us fooled.

For example Roger Fry, in his discussion of certain bronzes by Epstein, says:

"There is an undoubted pleasure in seeing any work accomplished with such confidence and assurance, such certainty and precision of touch . . . but the peculiar emotions which great sculpture gives seem to be quite different. They come from a complete equilibrium established through the interplay of diverse movements and a perfect subordination of surface and handling to the full apprehension of these and similar qualities."*

Now the supposed separation here between "pleasure" and the "peculiar emotion which great sculpture gives" plainly is merely an artificial separation, manufactured out of "policy" and given a certain surface plausibility by the employment of grandiose and hollow phrases. For obviously a "complete equilibrium established through the interplay of diverse movements etc" is really an attribute expected to *produce pleasure*, is it not? It may be that there is a difference in the *flavors* of the pleasures, be-

*Mr. Fry has said elsewhere "Reynolds was one of the few writers who rarely talked nonsense about art or *strained the expression of his feelings* with a view to effect." It is hardly a comment which we can apply to himself.

cause no two flavors can be alike, but that is the extent of the difference.

And similarly, when Edith Sitwell ascribes the beauty of a poem by Shelley to "the exquisite and flawless interweaving of two-syllabled and one-syllabled words" and when Lytton Strachey rhapsodizes about La Bruyere's rhythm, suspensions, elaborations, gradual crescendos and unerring conclusions, it is manifest that it is the capacity of these attributes to cause enjoyment that counts, although the fact is not mentioned.

All the qualities which critics are forever citing as causes or essences of beauty — Variety, Rhythm, Symmetry, Order, Unity, etc. — are dependencies in an equal sense. That is to say, they have importance only as instigators of something else. And if critics were sincere men with nothing to hide they would refer to these causes not in the abbreviated form given above, but in their full rendition: not Variety, but the pleasures derived from Variety; not Rhythm, but the pleasures derived from Rhythm.

In fact, I can hardly imagine any way that an intellectual sadist could better satisfy his proclivity than in observing the mental squirmings, contortions and back-breakings which White-Feather aestheticians undergo in order to make themselves think that beauty can simultaneously be and not be pleasurable. Most of these dolorific exhibitions naturally require pages, chapters and even volumes for the proper staging of them — and thus cannot here be quoted*. But I present one shorter example which may be illuminating: "The end of understanding poetry is enjoyment," says T. S. Eliot. That seems to be plain and uncompromising enough. But it is only the beginning of the sentence. He then adds the qualifying clause that "this enjoyment is gusto disciplined

by taste", which clearly is a simple playing with words and serves no purpose except as an "alibi", so to speak, by which he may later avoid the consequences of what he has said. Beauty is pleasure, but it isn't; appears to be a fair interpretation of his remark.

A variant of the same quibble manifests itself when critics try — as they often do — to split pleasure into two strongly differentiated segments — one of which somehow rids itself of all its accepted attributes and becomes something else.

Here is one of many such attempts:*

"The purpose of all art is fundamentally to delight; but it is not to entertain. Confusion often arises between the many novels produced for entertainment and those few which are works of art."

Actually there is only a vague and shadowy difference between delighting and entertaining and I think you will find it very difficult to think up any art work which does one without to some extent doing the other. And even if the difference exists there is not the slightest clue as to where the dividing point should be placed. One might as well try to create an impassable chasm between *long* and *very long*.

The basic reason for the continuances of this policy of pretense, as I have said, is a compound of romanticism, ethical theory and snobbishness — the desire to exclude the "outsider" from having any authority or venturing to express an opinion in an activity which has been so long, so gainfully and so flatteringly the prerogative of the *arbiter elegantiarum*.

For it must be remembered that in the moment that you openly identify beauty with mere pleasurability, whether present or future, — namely with the concept

*Arthur Calder-Marshall in *Fiction Today*.

which has, so to speak, always been the power behind the throne — you deliver two terrific blows to white-feather aesthetics, either one of which might by itself be mortal.

First you deprive beauty of the very attributes for which the concept was invented. You deprive it of its mysticism, its ambiguity, its chameleon-like ability to transform itself into whatever guise happened to rescue a critic from the logical dilemma in which he found himself.

And second, you deprive it of its potentialities of *stability*. To allege that art works which happened to possess a certain vague and enigmatic quality (such as beauty) were thereby rendered eternal (even though doing so aroused suspicion among the tough-minded) was at least a proposition which a smooth-talker very frequently could put over. Whereas the claim that art works happening to possess the everyday and well-understood attribute, pleasurability, could attain a similar endurance was far less likely to be accepted.

When a partisan of white-feather aesthetics assumes a knowing pose and proclaims the imperishable ART of Charles Lamb's *Dissertation upon Roast Pig* (of which the theme has become so obtrusively "clever" that many men would strongly resent being again subjected to it) he clearly has a maze of donjons, parapets and moats to take refuge in which would be wholly lacking if he should unqualifiedly assert it always made enjoyable reading.

Or consider Poe's famous two lines

To the Glory that was Greece

And the grandeur that was Rome

which I am certain have by now acquired for many people a greater power to annoy than to please; how much easier to say of them as Mr. J. M. Robertson has done — that they "have passed into the body of choice dis-

tillations of language reserved for immortality" than to say they are eternally delightful — even if we should mean eternally delightful only in relation to a "highly cultured" man.

Most of the out-played "beauties" which criticism is so desperately endeavoring to maintain on their "immortal" pedestals, are really "skills" which at one time astounded us, but have since been so frequently equalled — or even surpassed — *and so inordinately reiterated* — that their attraction barely revives. You can admire a carpenter's remarkable accuracy in driving nail after nail by a single blow, without a miss, or a circus performer's dexterity on the trapeze, but you cannot derive enjoyment from their performances indefinitely. Nor from more aesthetic proficiencies either. Skill — severed from a connection with pleasurability — is completely barren as a criterion of art or beauty, when you regard those concepts in a broad sense. Everything we now do — every casual act of daily life — lighting a match, setting one foot before the other, riding the subway, putting a record on the phonograph, turning the pages of a book, sewing on a button, knitting a scarf are skills — even great skills — if we look at them from far enough back in history. Are we to go into raptures, *today*, over the daguerreotype because of the ingenuity of its original invention!

This does not mean that skill is to be left out of account entirely. Its presence or absence in a work of art affects the probabilities of that art work's beauty, in the way that the loading of a pair of dice affects the probabilities of their throws. Skill is a rarity — by definition; and the consequence is that we encounter it less frequently than un-skill. That mere fact alone endows it with a greater likelihood of beauty; but it by no means justifies appraising an art work's beauty in terms of the skill em-

ployed in its creation. Skill is dominant only in a certain minor subdivision of art which, if we should establish it, might be termed *Exploit Art*. The function of this branch of art would be to record outstanding proficiencies in the history of art. On such an understanding the various upward steps in adroitness of diction, in musical technique, in draughtmanship or color blending would have a certain academic interest, just as in a manual of sport it would be worth recording the names of the first man who cleared fifteen feet in the pole vault or the first man who broke under ten seconds in the hundred yard dash. Claude Lorrain's priority in painting "atmosphere", Seurat's invention of pointillism, Nijinsky's knack for the entre-chat and for other techniques of the ballet, Paganini's virtuosity on the violin, Debussy's chord innovations; all of these accomplishments — regardless of how much they had since been imitated and even surpassed — would have due place in exploit art. But to pretend that this minor office of art was art itself, in its entirety; to build a hierarchy of beauty on such aptitudes no matter how extraordinary — as critics are so persistently and fatuously attempting — to talk in one minute in the terms of mere Exploit art and in the next minute in the terms of Universal Art without giving notice that a change of jurisdiction has occurred, is the kind of crime which can be committed only by haunted people, only by people who (like critics) feel an avenger always at their back, able to demolish them at a blow, who have first been rendered desperate by the constant imminence of their destruction and then have achieved a fatalistic calm at their continued amazing evasion of it.

Looking at the situation frankly it would seem that the time has come to end this secret affair between Beauty and Pleasure. Let's regularize it. Let's bring it over on Main Street and see what happens.

Chapter IV

FATIGUE PATTERN; AND ESCAPE FROM PHILOSOPHY

IN the moment that we outrightly identify beauty with pleasure (whether immediate pleasure or pleasure which we may later learn to savor) it must be admitted that various superficially unalluring consequences assail us. They are the very consequences, of course, the foreseeing of which has terrorized contemporary critics into an intellectual psychosis. Rather than face them they preferred to take refuge in the dream-world of White-Feather Aesthetics where they could make believe everything was in perfect order and play at being the Napoleons of art to their heart's content.

The first of these consequences is that we must allow circulation of that element we call FATIGUE not only through life in general but also into the most sacred domains of art. To the average man this may not seem overly objectionable; but to critics it is — and very strongly. In relation to “trashy novels”, “candy box pictures” and “popular music” they grudgingly concede to Fatigue a certain vulgar power. But at the higher levels, — in that lofty region of “true art” — its potency, if not outrightly denied is at least cancelled, either by lightly referring to it as a mere factor in the “futile” and “reprehensible” *qualitative-quantitative theory of art* or by simply pretending it doesn't exist. No poor relation, no social un-elect, has ever been so calmly looked-right-

through as if not there as fatigue has by our contemporary appraisers of beauty.

In present-day criticism there is no open discussion of the slackening of enjoyment of art works due to long perception of them. That first fresh thrill on initial perception seemingly must maintain itself in full force forever. There is no eyestrain — not the slightest; the stimuli coursing by the hour, day or month through man's nerve system — if originated by a "genuine" work of art — must not leave the smallest trace of weariness. Of course, critics rarely dare openly voice any such statements. They would be too extravagant. But they are tacitly implied — necessarily implied — by the entire trend of their commentary — by the tone of delight, even of rapture, for example, with which they speak of the paintings of Michel-Angelo or Velasquez or of the contents of the Uffizi Gallery. This rapture never varies. It is not great one day and less the next, as it naturally would be under the influence of fatigue. It is as steady and constant as the sun. It *must* be so, of course, in order to substantiate their authority as critics — in order to give a seeming warrant to their aesthetic verdicts.

I know of no better illustration of the absurdities to which critics will have recourse in the defense of their dogma than the pathetic effort which one of them* has made to counteract a revealing statement about fatigue by Edgar Alan Poe. Poe was much more artist than critic or he probably never would have been so frank.** He said:

"The most exquisite pleasures grow dull in repetition.

A strain of music enchants; heard a second time, it

*David Graham, in *Common Sense and the Muses*.

**He did not, however, develop the thought to its natural conclusion, nor be guided by it in his critical articles.

pleases; heard a tenth, it does not displease. We hear it a twentieth and ask ourselves why we admired; at the fiftieth, it induces ennui — at the hundredth, disgust."

Now, consider the critics supposed refutation of this exceedingly obvious veracity:

"I hope it is not true. In any case, his account of the matter does not agree with my own experience. I think he was mistaking the frequent for the commonplace. Even the constantly recurring Sunrise and Sunset, for instance, loses none of its charm by repetition; nor, to take a lower instance, is the hundredth strawberry less pleasant to the taste than the first — if you avoid surfeiting."

Is it conceivable that anybody but a critic could write such sentences without realizing their evasion of the point! And what a blindness (or hypocrisy) in those last four words, as though surfeiting were not exactly the problem being considered! I believe it is safe to say that if sunrises and sunsets of the type which we so frequently see anywhere in the world, should hereafter become observable only once a year and only from a single mountain-top in the Adirondacks, say, tourists would flock therewards on that day, in such multitudes as would soon convince this writer that sunsets *do* lose charm by repetition — very markedly.

Of course, I have no doubt a shrewder critic would regard with scorn both this individual writer's ineptness in meeting the problem and his naiveté in bringing it up — especially the latter. The shrewder critic knows that beauty's identity with pleasure is not spoken of by nice members of his profession and consequently he can continue to pretend that though all pleasures are dulled by repetition, beauties are not. Doing so is sly, under-

handed, cowardly — even contemptible. But what other course is available? Admit the potentiality of tiredness in art and his whole system crashes to ruin.

Imagine the effect, for example, if he should concede that the beauty of a certain masterpiece in the Metropolitan Museum could in any way be affected by the mere accident of which corridors in the gallery the observer chanced to traverse before viewing that masterpiece — or by the mere accident of the number of paintings he had perception of before reaching the masterpiece, or by the intensity of his perception of those paintings, or by the degree of their resemblance to the masterpiece he was soon to see and by the degree that these paintings consequently anticipated and thereby dulled the emotions the masterpiece would normally inspire.

If the beauty of an art work can be decreased by an observer's tiredness of it, then it necessarily follows that a second art work — despite critics having previously declared it inferior — would, if the observer chanced *not* to be tired of it, surpass in beauty the first one and (as I shall show later) might continue to surpass it forever. In which case I am wondering how long it would be before the critics would find some excuse (and I know they would) for reversing their judgment and declaring that the inferior picture had really been the superior one all the time.

The recognition of fatigue's influence does more, however, than destroy the notion that one art work is necessarily and always more beautiful than another. It is not sufficient to admit that the Aeneid is finer than Ben Hur, Symphony Fantastic finer than Valencia and a painting by Giotto finer than one by Maxfield Parrish *only when tiredness has not interfered with the situation*. We must also cease to believe in the permanent goodness of what

are customarily spoken of as "good qualities". And here again, as might be expected, we have the critics vehemently opposing us.

In their current romanticizing of beauty they are forever accounting for the beauty of this or the other art work by saying that it possesses certain specific attributes — sensitivity, for example, or universality, or coherence or subtlety and so on. Such qualities, if we are to believe them, are necessarily and always beneficial. No art work is conceivable which would not be improved by having them; and no art work could ever have too much of them.

For instance, one critic* says:

"What we seek and enjoy in art, what makes our heart leap up and ravishes our admiration, is the life, the movement, the passion, the fire, the feeling of the artist; that alone gives us the supreme criterion for distinguishing works of true and false art, inspiration and failure."

And another** remarks:

"A Maillol can express greater profundity of insight in a marble torso than a lesser artist could in an ambitious sculptural group."

Still another*** says:

"Many of the critics' mistakes could be avoided if, instead of accepting what is superficially pleasing, they would force themselves to look for that one quality in a creator which is most likely to disconcert them and most likely to assure his survival . . . we would call this quality intensity."

Now these qualities, regardless of their seeming so, are *not* perpetual beneficences; not to art works in gen-

*Croce.

**Theodore Meyer Greene in *The Arts and the Arts of Criticism*.

***Henri Peyre in his otherwise very helpful *Writers and Their Critics*.

eral, not to a torso by Maillol, not even to an art work in which the entire effort was to produce such qualities. And neither are such other qualities as unity, or integrity or sincerity or any that you care to select. They are good only when the perceiving man is untired of them; and the same statement, it must be remembered, may be made of their opposites. Shallowness is not the *bad* end of profundity, it is the other end. Disunity is not the bad end of unity, nor coldness the bad end of passion, nor calm the bad end of intensity, nor insincerity the bad end of sincerity. Each of them, or its opposite, is simply an aesthetic flavor, as artistically neutral as a hue in painting, as a tempo in music, as a "happy" or "unhappy" ending in literature or as Hemingway's "obsession with death", of which critics now so frequently speak, as though a clue could be found therein as to his "artistic greatness". It is how each flavor strikes man's fatigue pattern of the moment that counts, nothing else. Let me assure you that if, in place of the art we have today, there should be substituted an art of which every individual work were an extreme expression of profundity, say, man's response to the substitution would not be at all what critics try to make us think, but something altogether different, namely an outbreak of riots and insurrections in comparison with which the greatest of our wars would be as a lovers' spat. And if it could be imagined that in some remote section of the globe an art existed in which profundity was conspicuous by its absence there would be mass migrations therewards such as had never been known in all history. This is not to deny that man would probably tire of shallowness *faster* than of profundity; or of insincerity *faster* than of sincerity; but it does not follow that there is any quality of which he could stomach an infinity nor any quality of which a min-

ute dosage would not occasionally be welcome.

What perhaps first reveals to the ordinary man the absurdity of this allowing of special virtue to certain qualities is that even the critics who themselves inaugurated the system don't know how to operate it — not even at its most elementary levels. They are forever getting into arguments on points regarding which it would seem that a verdict must long ago have been rendered. Many of them, for instance, speak of certain art works as "mere escapism" with a contemptuous inflection as though the guillotine should be readied for their creators; whereas others consider the same quality as meritorious, and Willa Cather, one of the most highly-regarded of them, frankly declares that art *is* escapism. They devote untold pages to the relative value of *plot* and *character* in story-telling, to the "good" or "bad" influence of representationalism in painting, to the superiority of the simple over the intricate (or vice versa), until one wonders how it can be that after having had two thousand years to get their procedure codified they still do not know on which side in the battle for beauty, whether for or against us, are to be counted these (and many other) obviously primary ingredients of the artistic pharmacopeia.

Differences of opinion among them on such fundamental subjects seem as unbelievable — while their own principles are in control, that is — as would be differences of opinion — if we could imagine them to exist — as to whether baseball players should keep their eyes open or closed when going to bat or as to whether the runner should or should not remove his overcoat before competing in the high jump.

And if you should question whether critics do actually disagree on such elementary points, I refer you to a lead-

ing article in the New York Times Book Review* where in two well-known critics debate a question on which the correct answer, it seems, should have been imparted within the first three or four lessons of their course of instruction — the mere question, that is, of which is better in the writing art, clarity or obscurity. Can a more rudimentary issue be imagined?

One of the two partisans** (the one favoring clarity) said:

Now let us have some examples of the muddled writing for which in my opinion there is no excuse. Mr. Henry Green's novels are now very much in the intellectual fashion, presumably because he so loftily disdains syntax, grammar and punctuation. Here is a typical sentence from Page 1, of his new and much-praised story, modestly called *Nothing*:

'It was wet then, did she remember he was saying, so unlike this he said, and turned his face to its dazzle of window, it had been dark with sad tears on the panes and streets of canals as he sat by her fire for Jane liked dusk, would not turn on the lights until she couldn't see to move, while outside a single street lamp was yellow, reflected over a thousand raindrops on the glass, the fire was rose, and Penelope came in.'

Could anything be untidier? A schoolboy would be in trouble for such infantile, turbid, ill-punctuated stuff, with its flood of commas and contempt of all the rules of composition; those rules were not made to be a nuisance to writers but for the advantage of readers. As a reader I object to having this mess thrown at my head.

*Issue of July 30, 1950.

**Mr. Ivor Brown.

And ended with: —

The public as a whole — that is, the public barring the Intellectual Snobs — shows its sensible preference for having its artists in sufficient possession of their faculties to put us all, and immediately, in possession of their meaning. The artist who does not know his own intentions is a pretender. If he does know them and cannot express them he is merely incompetent. I hope I have made myself plain.

The other* retorted:

James Joyce dedicated himself to presenting a complete vision of life. This begins, in his great three-part epic, with the direct evocation of childhood in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*: 'Once upon a time and a very good time it was there was a moocow coming down along the road and this moocow that was down along the road met a nicens little boy named baby tuckoo.'

It ends, in the concluding section of *Finnegans Wake*, with a richly symbolic presentation of old age and death: 'And it's old and old it's sad and old it's sad and weary I go back to you, my cold father, my cold mad father, my cold mad feary father, till the near sight of the mere size of him, the moyles and moyles of it, moananoaning, makes me seasilt saltsick and I rush, my only, into your arms.' Between them his style, progressively more complex, parallels the development of the maturing mind. His symbols come to carry more and more meaning, and a more closely knit interrelationship of meaning. As we explore, their meanings yield further meanings: a clarity of continuous discovery.

These excerpts do not represent the entire dispute, but

*Mr. Lloyd Frankenberg.

they express its general trend. Let us begin by conceding that they are expertly phrased in the manner of the professional critic. There can be no quarrel as to that. And yet there is something jarring — even painful — in the affair, is there not? A sense of clashing in mental ages? If at a children's party we ask each little boy or girl which he or she likes better, sponge cake or angle cake, and then engage the two "sides" in a tug of war we feel that from our maturer experience we have been successful in giving a needed outlet to youthful exuberances in a manner that accords with their unsophistication. But when we observe grown men inveigled into a similar whimsy, tussling manfully about fiddlesticks, discharging verbal custard pies at each other as though they were thunderbolts, and the whole thing conducted seriously in a reputable periodical, supposedly for adults, the incongruity is so extreme that it is difficult to suppress a blush on behalf of everybody concerned, including even ourselves.

To reach a decision on this imagined "problem" is obviously as impossible (and even to attempt it as absurd) as to decide the relative merits of legato and staccato in music, or of vertical and horizontal canvases in painting.

Suppose the popular verdict were rendered in favor of clarity — as seems the more probable — would that mean that every occultism, every bewilderment, every seeing through a glass darkly, every crypticism, paradox, enigma, suspense, ghostly tremor, or grave-yard apparition; every somnambulist fantasy, sea-serpent, castle in the air, will o' the wisp or paranoiac aberration, whether purposed or accidental, be stricken from the art of the past and forbidden for that of the future? For clarity, either of syntax or phraseology would manifestly be an

obstruction to the creation of these interesting and essential flavors, not an assistance.

And what can we think of critics who ignore such considerations, unless we assume that they are thoroughly aware of them but find that to say so is to allow our escape from the aesthetic trance in which they like to retain us, as the snap of the finger releases the hypnotist's subject from his sleep.

From these considerations I think it is clear that every individual human being must be emotionally represented — when we attempt to assess his reaction to art works — not through what is called his temperament, but through something much more complex and variable than that — namely his **FATIGUE PATTERN**. And by that term I mean the assortment of nerve tirednesses and untirednesses which his regimen of life chances to have constructed or will later construct. During every moment of his existence — as he contemplates a landscape, as he opens a window, as he visits a theatre or reads a book, as he rests in bed or takes a bus ride, his pattern's interior ratios are being altered, and the beauty of every art work in the world is fluctuating in sympathy.

If for convenience, or to save time, a man desires to assert that a certain thing is beautiful or unbeautiful, it must always be done on the assumption of general similarity of his fatigue pattern to that of his companion. If he accepts the appraisals of some favored critic, it must be with the reservation that the critic is basing his decisions upon what he estimates to be the prevalence of a certain fatigue pattern among his readers, and knowing that although his appraisal is supposedly a sagacious guess, that guess could very easily be incorrect if, without his knowledge, all his readers had recently had an entirely different assortment of experiences than he was aware

of, and had consequently acquired a different proportion of tiredness than he could have been expected to foresee. There is no astrally correct nerve balance or unbalance, no one and only ideal and inevitable reaction to anything. Art is not nearly so set and prescribed an affair as our teachers would have us think.

And it must be remembered that this is by no means the same as stating — as many critics (rather grudgingly) now do — that beauty-appraisals are always subject to the observer's character or culture. Two men of exactly identical character and culture who only an hour previously might have had precisely similar reactions to a certain painting or musical composition could be thrown into complete opposition simply by the intervention, in the case of one of them, of a jading of the perceptive apparatus needed for the impression; and without any alteration whatever in his character outside of that one factor. It is conceivable that a day later they might be in entire conformity again — and it is also conceivable that the opposition might be widened into a permanent disagreement.

I said above that the accepting of Fatigue as a factor in art causes the entire philosophy of aesthetics — as at present established — to crash to ruin. Now if critics came straightforwardly out and denied this fact — and if they then demonstrated how there could be a reconciliation between Fatigue and their theory of art it would perhaps be possible still to regard them with respect. But they don't do that. Instead they try to frighten us out of the notion by what I can characterize only as intellectual blackmail — that is, by picturing to us once more the dreadful consequences of becoming addicts to Relativism or to the other already mentioned doctrinal backslidings against which they have so earnestly and so frequently warned us.

"If you persist in thinking", they declare, "that tiredness of an art work — even permanent tiredness — could in any degree alter its beauty you are destroying the value of expert opinion and reducing art to chaos."

No one of them has, of course, expressed the thought so honestly and bluntly as this. The phraseology is warier — and more round-about. But it means the same.

Here is one version:*

"Criticism is not a science, and the effort to reduce it to a science is one of the wildest and most deplorable aberrations into which the human mind has ever fallen. For science implies verification,† and aesthetic perception cannot be verified objectively. But we must not fall into the hopelessly and meaninglessly relativistic attitude of assuming that aesthetic perception cannot be verified at all. It must be verified in terms of general agreement, immediate or ultimate**, otherwise mankind is in a chaos of private uncommunicative worlds".

Here is another:‡

"Mere appreciations cannot be discussed; they can only motivate ejaculations of enthusiasms".

And a third:§

"If all judgments are equally valid, there is just my predilection and yours and the other man's, and we are not in the human realm at all; we are in a sub-human chaos".

I strongly resent being compelled — as I nevertheless am — to devote any part of this book to demonstrating

*Alfred Frankenstein in *Appraising Music and the Visual Arts*.

†There are no complete verifications: Science implies high probabilities. See Chapter VIII.

**There is no such general agreement, either immediate or ultimate, as very clearly demonstrated under the head "The Myth of Posterity" in Chapter 6 of Henri Peyre's *Writers and Their Critics*.

‡R. W. Church in "An Essay on Critical Appreciation".

§Eric Bentley in "The Importance of Scrutiny".

that the threat of chaos with which critics have so long been fooling us is mere bluff. To be forced to take time out for the refuting of what anybody should have been able to perceive was sham is a tribute to their powers of deception and a reflection upon our own intelligence which I dislike allowing. They are as smugly flattered by it as is the confidence man by the newspaper write-up of his swindle.

In fact — except among the rank and file — I doubt if critics themselves have ever believed in the reality of this chaos. It has always been a *bête noire* to shoo us away with, more than anything else. What they really fear is our exploration of the chaos and discovery of its innocuance — and a consequent reduction of their employment as guides.

The choices available to us are not, as they pretend, merely order and chaos. A third is available — namely semi-chaos — a much friendlier and more companionable concept than the unmixed form of itself — as we human beings have every reason to know.

For clearly whatever order man has been able to endow life with — in any of its manifestations — has been attained not by defying chaos, but by a sort of compromise with it — designed to supply us a *modus vivendi*. Even science — despite our rhapsodies concerning its “objectivity” and “truth” — is merely a state of armistice; and its extension and progress are best served by a frank recognition of the fact. Anarchy is always just around the corner, haggling with us over every forward step we take; perhaps making terms with us occasionally, but never granting us a permanent peace.

Man has to accept that sort of world. No other kind exists; and there is nothing which should more quickly arouse his suspicion than a system which professes — as

White-Feather aesthetics does — to rescue him from it.

* * * *

Now under Factual Aesthetics' frank acknowledgment that fatigue exists there are two measures by which we obtain not a *complete order* but a sufficient dole of it to get along with. One of them is by enlisting the aid of that extremely important phenomenon of life — PROBABILITY. If there are no certitudes upon which we can rely, there are nevertheless all degrees of approximations to certitudes. There are tendencies, trends and tides which cause this, that or the other event *usually* or *almost always* to occur. As I shall demonstrate later, probability furnishes both a more dependable and a more interesting foundation for criticism than the so-called "good taste" or the test of time, upon which it now stands. Factual Aesthetics, in other words, resembles the semi-chaos or rule of probability which ultimately develops in bridge-whist after the hands have been bid and the cards begin to fall; whereas White-Feather Aesthetics resembles the pretended "unchaos" which results when from the turning up of the king of diamonds we tell a young woman that she will shortly meet a handsome man with a great deal of money.

The other steady influence is the existence of a definite objective for art. This objective is not one of the vague, precarious and fanciful ideals with which pedants like to seduce us but something attainable — something that actually, while in our sober senses and completely free from demagogues and spell-binders, we perceive to be within our power to achieve — namely the lengthening of our stay in this world, the extending of our span of life. We can increase our longevity — immeasurably, unlimitedly.

And here is where the significance and pertinency of what I have written becomes apparent. The force by which we accomplish this is *art* — that larger and universal art of which the fine arts are merely adjuncts. That is the function of art — to prolong life. That and nothing else. Art accomplishes this by being that which I have said it is; by being whatever things we are not, at the moment, tired of; by therefore bestowing on us emotions for which we are hungry; and resting us from emotions of which we have had an excess. Art is an extremely practical thing. It's a strategy of behavior — not an aesthetic dream.

Art cannot give enjoyment permanently, but it can direct the proper distribution of temporary enjoyment — it can bring excitation to those nerve centers which are eager to carry their share of life's assaults, it can relieve the tiredness which is crushing and overwhelming other nerve centers. In a way, we are like pianos — our lasting powers depending on the intelligent distribution of life's music over our entire range rather than its concentration on a few notes or a single octave. Art is simultaneously a stimulating and a cushioning force. It diverts the life-attack to those channels most eager and able to support it. It broadens and complexifies the whole nerve system and thereby constructs a stronger base and foundation of resistance.

It is true that deaths, as we now record them, are more often ascribed to definite organic ailments than to a mere exhaustion of nerve structure. Any such diagnoses are the result, however, of a superficial examination of surface conditions, rather than of an analysis of basic causes. The over-all condition of a man's physical system, his will to live, his intellectual and emotional breadth and ambition are the truly determining factors in his longe-

vity. When this stimulating force is present the encroachment of local weaknesses can be immeasurably deterred, and life correspondingly prolonged. Man dies when he is tired of existence.

The truth of this assertion is entirely apparent, as so often, in its simpler manifestation. Only in its complexities does it become less obvious. Consider the so-called necessities of life; water, food, clothing, shelter. Actually none of them is strictly a necessity. Man can go days without water, weeks without food and years without clothing and shelter. More realistically they are not necessities of life, but prolongers of life. I do not think that any person would deny them that function. But in what way do they prolong life? Surely they could not be characterized — any more than art could be — as remedies for any of the maladies to which death is ordinarily attributed. No physician would specifically prescribe them to cure cancer, tuberculosis, appendicitis or pneumonia. On the other hand, neither would he for a moment permit their omission. To do so would simply be a gesture of bankruptcy — a giving up of hope. He *assumes* their presence. They are the life forces in the background — maintaining the patient's vitality and energy while he, the doctor, undertakes local repairs and corrections which without them would be impossible.

That is wholly their function, and when this is understood there remains only one more step to take. Man must also perceive that these extremely obvious prolongers of life, which he already concedes to have that potency, are merely the more primitive forms of those other prolongers of life which he happens to call art. The purpose of clothing and shelter is to repel the overtaking of one portion of his nerve system (that which is susceptible to wind, rain and cold) and thus enable him to give other

sections of his being the activation they require. Their purpose then is exactly the purpose of all art — namely to bring him emotions for which he is eager and rest him from those of which he is tired. Water, food, clothing and shelter can be said by themselves to give man a life-expectancy, say, into the forties and fifties. As civilization progresses beyond these “necessities”, as life elaborates itself — as literature, painting and music make their contribution, longevity is thereby extended to the sixties, seventies and eighties — and with infinite potentialities beyond.

Once we have protected ourselves from Nature’s more brutal and elementary assaults we begin to feel its lighter and more subtle attacks, which even though lighter and more subtle can nevertheless be just as damaging if allowed too long to continue. They do not cut our lives suddenly short; they attenuate them — imperceptibly and insidiously. To meet their slow whittling away we must adopt more intricate expedients. We must make roads, build dams and boats; harness the forces of steam, invent the telephone and radio, establish the ideas of religion and a god, make up stories about them, write books and plays, compose music and paint pictures. These things are not necessarily pleasures — any more than was the first cave in which primitive man found shelter. They *may* be pleasures, and eventually they may *cease* to be pleasures. It makes no difference whether they are or not; because they are something much more important — they are the weapons by which we fight off death. The last ten years of our lives are just as vital to us as the first ten, and it is these alleged “superfluities” and “luxuries” — as pedants like to call them — which bring us these last ten years.

There is no intention here to belittle medical science’s

contribution either to the prolongings of life that have already been achieved or that will be achieved. But it is not alone in the battle. Art is an active partner. Senility is a curable disease — that is the main point. Art and medicine have shared and will continue to share in its abatement — in fact medicine is merely a part of art.

Permit me now to return momentarily to a statement I made earlier*: that art and aesthetics could work themselves out of their present state of bewilderment and paralysis only by what I termed an *escape from philosophy*. Now for art — or any other human activity — to escape from philosophy one thing and only one thing is necessary — namely to assign to itself a *definite and self-sufficient objective*. If I state positively that my objective in going into business is to make money *and nothing else*, if I state positively that my objective in getting married is to obtain an heir to my title of nobility *and nothing else*, then I am impervious to philosophy's questionings as to why I want to make money, or why I want an heir, and to its suggestions that "happiness" or making the world a better place to live in would perhaps be better objectives.

You can, of course, insist that there is no such thing as an entirely definite and self-sufficient objective, and consequently no such thing as a complete escape from philosophy. But there nevertheless seems to be degrees of precision of objectives and degrees of their practicality. The *improving of the world, goodness, happiness* and so on, are not only vague concepts, but also hard to specify. There is not even any actual proof that we have ever made so much as the smallest progress towards any

*See page 6.

one of them. How can you direct your movement when there is no sense of movement?

Longevity, on the other hand, is at least something which we see to be humanly attainable. We feel ourselves going towards it. Not only that but in the process of attaining it we seem inevitably to attain health, a moral life, an increase in knowledge and at least our fair share of happiness. They are necessary concomitants of a long life. To me that is a great deal, and as much as we have any right to expect from art. To look to it as a means to enter an earthly paradise is not only unfair, but leads simply to a futile and irksome running around in circles.

And most important of all there is a satisfying sense of adhering to observed facts and an end of the necessity to force and strain our instincts out of their natural course. Art moves into this channel spontaneously, all we have to do is cease obstructing it.

* * * *

Let it not be thought that this rather physical view of art leaves what we term *culture* out of account. Not at all. Culture is always given full consideration, but never as the dominating force. It's always treated as a subsidiary state of mind which affects the *speeds* at which man tires of art works and does not determine the degree of their art.

If the world were inhabited exclusively by cultured men a different set of probabilities would prevail as to which art works would most frequently be pleasurable, than would prevail if it were inhabited by uneducated men. Granted. But notice that I say probabilities, not certainties. The mere possession of culture does not inevitably dictate any individual man's exact degree of enjoyment of an art work. How can it when we admit

— as we are forced to do — that when we present that art work to his attention we have nothing except conjecture to tell us how much or how little he happens to be tired of it at the moment? Even if we should know in advance that it was a complex art work of which he would tire slowly or that it was a simple art work of which he would tire rapidly — even that knowledge would not eliminate the factor of conjecture.

There are some extremely interesting problems in this process of "culture" which I shall fully discuss in a later chapter, where they more aptly belong. For now, let me merely say that it is the relationship of complexities that tells the story — the ratio of the complexity of the art work to the complexity of the man who perceives it.

Chapter V

PATTERN OF EQUAL BEAUTY AND URGE TO COMPLEXITY

IT must not be thought that the recognizing of beauty as pleasure causes art to become the *pursuit of pleasure* — using this phrase in its customarily disparaged sense. Art is much more than that. It is a maneuvering of pleasure — a so directing of it that there shall develop no excessive concentration of fatigues on one section of man's nervous system and consequently no premature break-down there while other sections are still strong and capable of coming to the rescue if given the opportunity. Neither inordinate starvations nor inordinate surfeits should be permitted; but this does not imply that there shall be no restraints nor self-discipline whatever in man's conduct.

There are connections between art works which have to be taken into consideration. There is a surface pleasurable, for instance, in the thought of leaping off into space from a high building; tied into it, however, is the subsequent impact with the ground. Eating one's fill of rich food is closely connected with obesity; murdering a person from whom one anticipates inheriting a large sum of money involves being hunted by the police. And so on. Sometimes the consequence is certain, sometimes there is a possibility that it may be avoided. What I am endeavoring to point out is that these seemingly pleasurable acts are merely *one part* of a larger art work

— like the enjoyable prologue of a drama which subsequently deteriorates to banality. Most persons gradually learn to guard themselves against these deluding gratifications because they are so able to invoke the future pains, and feel them *in advance*, as it were, that the initial pleasures are thereby cancelled. And if it be said that this is rather a crude substitute for moral principles let us not forget that it is nevertheless a highly effective one, and in very wide employment today.

There are of course reverse connections. The pain of climbing a mountain is corrected by a vivid anticipation of a fine view from the summit; the labor of study is reduced by the hope of graduating from college with honors; and prospects of a trip to Europe or a new automobile lend charm to saving enough money to pay for them.

This of course raises the question of how we shall know which pains are worth enduring for the sake of the future pleasures that might result from them and which are not. I shall answer that later.

It is well to remember also that all art works, even masterpieces, share this dual nature, this connection, that is with a detriment. Attached to Siegfried Idyl — and inseparable from it — is the possibility of having too much of Siegfried Idyl. Attached to Three Musketeers, Liberty Bell March, the Decameron, Westminster Abbey, Largo al Factotum, a beautiful girl and having plenty of money is the knowledge that we cannot exploit to infinity our enjoyment of them — that the attempt to do so simply brings to the surface their “second self”, our tiredness of them.

With this prior defence against possible attacks either from puritans who look upon any pleasure as corrupting or from philosophers who deprecate “pleasure” in con-

trast to "happiness" as though there were any difference between them except in the contour of their fluctuations*, let us revert to our main subject — the physical phenomena of *beauty*, of *untiredness* or of *pleasure* (selecting whichever of these three approximately synonymous terms suits your fancy) and how the proper manipulation of them extends man's longevity.

And now we must admit into Art's sanctum another prosaic concept which — like fatigue — has hitherto been vigorously and arrogantly excluded by the courtly personages who have been sipping their tea there. I refer to Distribution, that is the geographic and physical location of art works and the degree of their handiness to the general perception of mankind, as it affects either the frequency or intensity of that perception. So far as may be gathered from a reading of critical literature, both past and present, Distribution has no more to do with beauty than metabolism or nux vomica could be imagined as having. The charm of Niagara Falls is the same to the man who lives at its verge as to the visiting tourist. The loveliness of Rheims Cathedral is completely independent of whether the observer happens to be an inhabitant of Rheims itself, or of Chicago, Illinois. The inaccessibility of a certain painting by Titian in the library of a misanthropic private collector is an influence of no relevance to the painting's beauty, either to the possessor or to others.

Let us leave this obtuse and nonsensical dim-sightedness to those who derive satisfaction from self-deception,

*Happiness is more accurately represented by long slow waves never rising very high above or sinking very far below the norm; pleasure by much more violent, irregular — and sometimes even mountainous surges in both directions. Happiness is for careful methodical persons; pleasure for the adventurer (or adventuress) who is willing to pay for ecstasies with corresponding depressions, and who is physically capable of supporting these extremes.

and instead examine what man has actually lost by the ignoring of Distribution as a vital factor in art, and by the resulting inadequate endeavors to improve it.

First, it has limited the number of emotions within man's reach, and consequently hindered his applying to the unbalance of his Fatigue Pattern those combinations furnishing exactly the proportion of rest and activation which could restore the equilibrium. This is the obvious and most outwardly apparent harm.

But there is a deeper and more damaging injury, which introduces the added hurt of a vicious circle. Maldistribution not only produces this reduction in stock, but it tends to *perpetuate* the reduction by its fabrication of that noxious belief that one art work can intrinsically and by its own nature be permanently more beautiful than another. Naturally, if this condition of beauty-superiority is accepted as irremediable, the ambition to attempt its correction through proper distribution (or any other expedient) is destroyed, and mankind is consequently talked into a perceptual unevenness and distortion which ordinarily would need nothing but a bit of clear-sighted and resolute action for a complete cure.

Although I am forced to concede that there is a certain psychological satisfaction in this fancy of beauty-superiority — akin perhaps to the illusory belief that every cloud has a silver lining — it is seen to be erroneous as soon as we openly (instead of clandestinely) identify beauty with pleasure — as can very very quickly be demonstrated simply by producing perfect distribution imaginatively and observing the consequences.

Suppose we try it in relation to painting. Assume that the distributional difficulty derived from the fact that pictures are bulky and indiscriminately scattered through the globe had somehow been corrected in such manner

that every picture in existence could be immediately brought within the perception of each human being on earth. Nothing would be required of him but to turn his eyes in this way or the other.

What would be the result? Obviously, only one, namely that all the pictures in the world would attain and hold for so long as this perfect distribution continued, exactly the same level of attraction. For manifestly if any single one should momentarily rise above the rest, this discrepancy could immediately be corrected by directing the glance towards it and thus liquidating that superior beauty through visual perception. A complete equality in the dispensing of aesthetic enjoyment would prevail throughout the entire collection. Art would be in a state of exact equilibrium.

However, that's strictly in regard to beauty — strictly in regard to the pleasurable emotion of the instant. It by no means implies a similar parity in other aspects. It by no means implies that in order to attain this equality of beauty, each picture must be subjected to the same kind and degree of contemplation. Actually just the opposite is the case. Some pictures are more complex than others; their stimulations reach man's perception through a larger number of nerve channels. Consequently they possess a stronger foundation for resistance to reiteration, and lose their beauty (or man's untiredness of them) at a less speed than a simpler picture which activates fewer channels. The result would be that man's eyes would remain longer on these pictures. The residue of enjoyment which they had accumulated since they were last seen would require more time to be ingested before the eyes turned elsewhere. This does not mean that complexity is the true criterion of art — as I shall show later — nor even that it is superior to simplicity.

On the contrary, perception of that highly elementary painting, depicting a vividly-colored disk against a monotone background, might be just as much needed, but its contribution could be more rapidly absorbed. A few seconds might suffice, whereas with the complex pictures many minutes might be enjoyably expended.

It is clear, therefore, that to maintain all these paintings at an exact equality of beauty it would be necessary to establish a certain pattern of man's contemplation of them. His available time would have to be proportionately allotted — an extremely small or negligible percentage for this picture, slightly more for another, still more for a third, and so on. Suppose we call that particular time-apportionment, the Pattern of Equal Beauty.

Although this is the only pattern which can thus hold art in a state of exact equilibrium, it is clear that if with one kind of fatigue pattern you can create one kind of art (or beauty), then with other patterns you can create other kinds. But the others will all be arts of disequilibrium; arts in which some particular classification maintains the beauty-advantage. Pattern L, for instance, could be designed to give the beauty-advantage to landscapes by reducing the allotment of time apportioned to the perception of landscapes. By a similar adjustment Pattern A could be designed to give the beauty-advantage to abstractions, Pattern W to pictures containing warm colors, Pattern C to pictures of high complexity, etc. Imagine any precedence of beauty you desire, no matter how fantastic, and a pattern of time apportionment can be constructed which will produce exactly this precedence. Man can move beauty around as if it were a quantity of adhesive particles, attaching large or small amounts of it to any object he might choose, although some results would be more difficult to achieve than others.

So much for the fallacy of inherently superior beauty. However, there is one more theme to our plot which I wish to develop while we are still considering this artificial world of perfect distribution — and that is MEMORY.

In the beginning of perfect distribution, when for the first time all the pictures in the world are perceptible to man, with equal facility, a lively desire to reinspect the earliest ones will accrue before the last one has been observed. And this may persist for a considerable number of reinspections. The mere numerical quantity of pictures will account for that. But eventually — and this is the theme I wish to develop — there will gradually become apparent a general downward trend of enjoyment. *Memory will begin to assert itself.* The picture which he had previously almost forgotten, when its turn for re-perception came, will each time be better remembered. That color effect which had been so pleasurable before; that interesting line and convolution which initially had so charmed, will progressively be less felt. And if, by the process of study, he learns to see hitherto unappreciated effects, those too will eventually deteriorate, even though they may retard the rate of deterioration; for we cannot at all allege that the number of perceptible new effects is infinity* — not when we are discussing man-made art works. He will find himself, therefore in the grip of a whirlpool drawn down and down with ever-increasing speed to exhaustion and death.

What this demonstrates is both the benefit derived from distribution and the limitations to that benefit. The

*Of course this prattle about "infinity" is one of the popular hedges of present-day criticism. I have heard critics — even museum curators — straight-facedly comment without an apparent qualm or mental misgiving, on the "inexhaustible beauties" in a certain painting, and the next day walk by that same painting without even a sideways glance towards it.

benefit results from the fact that although the repertory of possible perceptions, throughout the world, has not actually been increased, in toto, it has been tremendously increased *in relation to the individual*. There would have been furnished him immense opportunities to enlarge and differentiate his perceptions, and to apply these new perceptions for the correction of his tiredness-pattern — and simultaneously to delay the harmful effects of the too-well remembered, by giving him more things to remember. And obviously, — unless we are prepared to deny the malignance of lassitude and nerve-prostration — his life-expectancy would thereby be increased.

The limitation of the benefit is simply the fact that once distribution is perfect nothing more remains to be done in that direction.

And the same sense of having reached a dead end will similarly be felt even if we should achieve perfect distribution not only in the art of painting but also in music, literature, social relations and all other activities of life.

Memory can be regarded both as an aid and as a challenge to distribution. It is an aid because it serves partially to correct the inadequacies of distribution. It is a challenge because it is constantly making more demands of distribution and when these demands can no longer be answered — that is, when distribution has attained complete efficiency — then memory, so to speak, revolts from distribution, and causes man to turn elsewhere in his effort to escape the mounting monotony which memory produces.

The direction in which he must turn, I consider obvious. He must turn to what we call CREATION — which may be defined as the production of additional art works in order to impose further and more difficult tasks for memory.

In other words, man's so called *instinct for self-preservation* expresses itself in much subtler ways than we realize. It keeps him, true, from the precipice, the python's embrace, the crater's edge, the hurricane, the tidal wave and other recognized dangers. But it also — and much more significantly — is impelling him continually *towards the more complex*. An extremely vital factor which we can name the URGE TO COMPLEXITY draws thus into view; and it becomes evident that if we are to extend our longevity we must exercise and consummate this urge in every way possible. There are of course reactions towards simplicity as simplicity regains allure through our abstention from it but the progression towards complexity is soon resumed.

Manifestly present-day aesthetics, in its monotonous and obtuse praising of allegedly "flawless" art works, of "classics" and of the immortal geniuses who composed them is exactly on the other side — is always fighting against our best interests, trying to enclose us in a reiteration of masterpieces which should long ago have been allowed quietly to subside into a general fund of art, available when emotionally desirable — as are a drink of water; a warm fire; a supply of salt, pepper or clove; a visit to the moving picture; a trip to the bathing beach; or any other of the notes or chords in life's symphony; and is thereby impairing our health and shortening instead of lengthening our stay on earth.

From this it becomes clear, I believe, that what distinguishes the *creative artist* from the *ordinary man* is his possession of so good a memory that the available art works in the branch of art which is his specialty become easily remembered at an *early stage of his life*.

For the *ordinary man* — as I implied earlier in this chapter — there is often considerable scope for the ex-

ercise of his *ordinary* memory even in a world of maldistribution. A good part of his life may have elapsed before the art works which are easily available for contemplation in his own surroundings become too well remembered and monotonous. And if that condition does arise, he can at least reduce its distress by occasional excursions into other territory where new resources may be available. It's not an ideal procedure, and the physical wear both in restraining his desire for change and in eventually searching for change, are contra- instead of pro-longevity; but at least the opportunity is present, and there is not a sense of complete frustration and imprisonment. By the time the sense of being shackled becomes obtrusively painful he is an "old man", his vital energies have been greatly reduced and he accepts the gradual deterioration into oblivion without too violent a struggle.

The situation in the case of a creative artist, who possesses, as I have said, this characterizing attribute of superior memory, is very different. By early youth, he reads at a glance "masterpieces" which ordinary men are only dimly and laboriously studying. He can mentally recreate them at will, and consequently absorb their emanations in absentia. The whole book of art, or at least that part which is relevant to him, is not a challenge and inspiration, as it is to most humanity, but a "first reader", stuffed with platitudes and clichés. The thought that this puerility is to be his life sustenance not only dismays and exasperates him, but also injures him physically. It sets him plunging at the walls of his cage like a newly-captured tiger. And inasmuch as this sense of hurt comes to him at a time when he still has ample strength, he usually succeeds in making a break in the cage; and the result of that break — in fact the proof and symbol of

it — is the creation of art works that make new demands on his capacity to remember and thus rest him from the too easy retrospection of his past. If you wish this thought expressed in terms of artistic accomplishment it could be said that an artist produces his most complex painting (or in the language of popular aesthetics his "greatest" painting) when he knows all the paintings in the world so well — and has become so tired of them, and consequently *dislikes them so much* — that to paint something entirely different and more advanced becomes a physical necessity to him. This fact is obvious — and yet how utterly it contradicts the notion of enduring beauty by demonstrating that art progresses not by preserving beauty but by destroying it, not by the love of beauty but by the hate of it.

Chapter VI

CULTURE AND COMPLEXITY

AT various stages in this book — and particularly where I have emphasized the effect of fatigue in reducing the pleasurability of so-called masterpieces of art — it may have appeared that insufficient attention has been paid to the concept of CULTURE.

The man who has “educated his taste” is usually considered so aesthetically superior to the philistine — his perceptions are supposedly on so removed a plane — that it would appear impossible to apply the same terms and standards to his feelings as to those of his less sophisticated fellow men.

Actually this is not the case at all. Although the solution may be different, the terms and standards used in reaching that solution are exactly identical. The possession of a certain degree of culture has important consequences, obviously. How far an individual man has progressed in the process of “learning to appreciate” a particular art work has an effect on the degree of his enjoyment of it — on the degree of beauty it appears to him to possess — but that effect is not at all what it is usually considered to be. It can by no means be said that the greater the man’s culture the greater will be his enjoyment of what is called a masterpiece of art and the less will be his enjoyment of what is called trashy or vulgar. Any such notion, no matter how generally accepted, is incorrect. A man’s culture has a much less uplifting and

romantic (though no less far-reaching) consequence than that. It determines one thing and one thing only — namely the speed of an art work's decline in beauty under his contemplation of it. And clearly a mere advance knowledge of that speed of decline does not by itself tell us what point in the scale of beauty the art work may be occupying, any more than knowledge of the velocity at which an object fluctuates between two extremes can by itself determine what its present position may be.

If we look on the perceiving man's culture, therefore, as affecting only an art work's rapidity of movement towards less or greater beauty, in relation to himself, and not as determining the fixed degree of its beauty, it must be conceded, I believe, that culture has been very fully considered in my discussions, though perhaps not under its own name. For both the importance and the cause of the changes in man's enjoyment of art works have been strongly and repeatedly stressed. The only possible fault that could be found is that I have attributed the velocity of change to a certain factor called complexity rather than to culture; and this complaint vanishes when I assert that so far as man's own psychology is concerned, complexity and culture are the same thing. By making progress towards complexity man inevitably makes an exactly equivalent progress towards culture. By developing his capacity to respond complexly to art works, he develops his appreciation of them.

Therefore the analysis, which I shall now undertake, of what a man's advance towards *complexity* accomplishes for him in his perception and enjoyment of art works, is the same thing as an analysis of what his advance towards *culture* does for him, under the same circumstances. And of course, complexity is regarded as the exact contrary of simplicity; by high complexity I

mean low simplicity, and by zero-complexity I mean hundred percent simplicity. I am sorry if these next few pages require a certain amount of diagram-scrutiny and abstract thinking but there seems to be no way to avoid it; and the information derived will be extremely helpful, I assure you.

Let me begin by emphasizing that complexity is not to be confused with mere mixed-up-ness or jumble. In fact it is just the opposite. When a man perceives an art work as complex his nerve system is complexly activated by it, along *many, widely-branching* nerve channels, whereas when he perceives an art work as mixed-up-ness, his nerve system is unable to perceive it complexly, is unable to spread its stimulation through many channels, and consequently perceives mixed-up-ness and jumble as a frustration to complexity, so to speak, — as a concentration on a limited nerve area. For example, a combination of lines to which man can respond complexly he calls a “design” or a “picture”. A combination of lines to which man finds himself unable to respond complexly he calls a tangle or blot.

There are two basic facts upon which our analysis of complexity must rest, as follows:—

1. Man's capacity to perceive art works complexly increases continuously from birth to death (or senility).
2. Art works tend to maintain a certain natural degree of complexity *inherent in themselves*, depending largely on the degree of complexity originally infused in them by the artist who created them.

The first fact appears to me self-evident; the second requires some elucidation, especially as an art work's “natural” degree of complexity by no means corresponds

to the degree of complexity in which the observer perceives it, but is simply an influence in determining that degree.

To illustrate, allow me to create three imaginary men, as follows:

- (1) A musically semi-cultured man of today
- (2) A musically highly-cultured man of today
- (3) A musically super-cultured man of two hundred years from today.

Let us suppose that the musically semi-cultured man has arranged a series of musical compositions which, in *relation to himself*, summarize the scale from zero-complexity to hundred per cent complexity; thus:—

The single chord CEG
Chopsticks
Pop Goes the Weasel
American Patrol
Manhattan Beach March
William Tell Overture

Succeeding renditions of these compositions, in that order, constitute for him an increasing perception of complexity up to his full capacity for complexity, so far as music is concerned.

Now what happens if we request the highly-cultured man similarly to arrange a series of musical compositions up to what he perceives, for himself, as hundred per cent complexity. Does he alter the semi-educated man's list? Probably not. He is usually quite satisfied with that relation of complexities *as far as it goes*. He simply adds

more compositions at the high-complexity end, so that his list appears thus:

The single chord CEG
Chopsticks
Pop Goes the Weasel
American Patrol
Manhattan Beach March
William Tell Overture
and in addition
Invitation to the Waltz
Surprise Symphony
Scheherazade
Afternoon of a Faun

If we ask what these additional compositions are to the semi-educated man, the answer is clear; they are not further progressions towards complexity but are retrogressions towards simplicity. He perceives each one, in turn, as more and more resembling what he would call "mixed-up-ness", or "jumble" or "mere noise". The only factor which could modify this impression — or at least induce him to endeavor to modify it — would be his possibly having heard of the highly-cultured man's reputation as an expert; in which case he might therefore assume that the compositions which he himself perceived as mere simplicities, in reality possessed inherent complexities if only he could learn to understand them.

Finally the complexity arrangement of the super-cultured man of two hundred years from today would be identical with that of the highly-cultured man except for a further addition, at the high-complexity end of the scale, of certain new selections, say composition X, composition Y, and composition Z. And the only difference between the reaction of the highly-cultured man towards those latest additions, as compared to the previous re-

actions of the semi-cultured man would be that he would have no clue at all to inform him of the complexity possibilities in composition X, Y, and Z.

And so on. Music — and the other arts as well — build up and up in complexity, laying stage after stage on the foundations of previous generations, each art work having a probable and fairly definite place in the scale.

It is not necessary to remind ourselves that this theory — even in music where it fits best — is far too simple and neat to be always dependable. That fact goes without saying. There are infinite variations and implications that have not been explored. There are infinite different paths along which progression towards complexities can be made, just as there are infinite directions of radiation from the sun. Some men have natural aptitudes along one path — and make especially rapid progress there — and some along another; and the paths interweave and obscure each other in their trends and directions. We can, perhaps, never be certain — when we feel that we have left far behind the complexities of a certain art work — that the creator of that art work did not infuse into it certain advanced complexities along a path with which we are unacquainted. "Clarissa Harlowe" may involve social implications we have not understood. "The Forsaken Merman" may contain unseen symbolisms. So may Kamenoi Ostrow, Trilby, The Rake's Progress, a Van Gogh self-portrait and the Parthenon. Mystic harmonies, rhythms and motivations may still lurk in Marriage of Figaro, The Wonderful One Hoss Shay, Finlandia, Taj Mahal and Danse Macabre.

As to exactly when we can be certain that all such possibilities have been exhausted it would be foolish to guess. My only contention is that all of them are exhaustible. The world contains a very large number of thinking men,

and the chance that any creative artist would make such extreme progress along certain complexities that not a single one of these men would ever overtake his progression seems negligibly small.*

Another factor in the situation which must be considered is that art works have parts and sections of themselves, which are to some extent, independent entities and must therefore have special positions of their own, in the scale of complexity, and thus make indistinct the position in the scale which their wholes would occupy. All these complications blur and complicate the theory but they do not invalidate it nor destroy its use for the purposes of this book.

It now becomes clear, I believe, exactly what the relationship is between what I have called the two basic facts in the situation.

If man makes a continuous progression towards more and more complexity, whereas art works tend to maintain, as I have above explained, a natural and reasonably stable degree of complexity, then it follows that if man lives long enough, he will eventually catch up with and pass the complexity of every art work in the world, just as a train, if it travels far enough, will pass every station and object along its route.

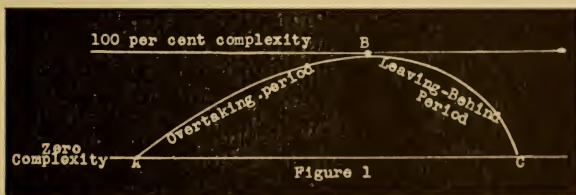
And at this point let us not be taken in by romantic rhapsodizings as to the inexhaustible complexity latent in the writings of Shakespeare or Goethe, in the music of Verdi or Beethoven, in the paintings of Rembrandt or Renoir. These geniuses did not attain an infinity of talent; or if they did — if completely god-like beings are

*This is challenged by Mr. Henri Peyre in his *Writers and their Critics*, where he says: "genius was no more ahead of its own time than of ours; it is ahead of all times." In relation to the extreme unsentimentality of the rest of Mr. Peyre's book this statement seems so incongruous that possibly I have misinterpreted it.

circulating freely among us with the otherwise extremely animal characteristics which biography has recorded for the above-mentioned "geniuses" — then it is clearly futile for the rest of us, who are admittedly human, in the least to concern themselves with art or attempt to create it against such overwhelming competition. However, so far as this book is concerned, no credit will be given to this notion of omniscience — no art works possessing this immeasurable and inexhaustible store of understanding will be conceded as having existence; and all, on the contrary, will be assumed to have attainable degrees of complexity, and consequently subject to being eventually caught up with and passed by man.

This does not imply that when a man "catches up with" this complexity of a certain art work the complexities and nerve reactions which he senses correspond identically with those the artist felt when he created the art work. Any such exact duplication is obviously impossible; but the approximation is near enough for use as a working basis.

The effect of man's thus overtaking and then leaving behind art works is to give each art work, as I shall explain in a moment, a complete cycle of complexity in



relation to man, from simplicity (or zero complexity), to hundred per cent complexity and back again to simplicity. Figure 1 is a visualization of this cycle, starting

in zero complexity at A, rising to hundred per cent complexity at B, and declining again to zero complexity at C. From A to B is the overtaking period, from B to C the leaving behind period. It will be noticed that there is only one period of high complexity, at and near B, but two periods of simplicity, one in the overtaking period at and near A, and one in the leaving behind period at and near C.

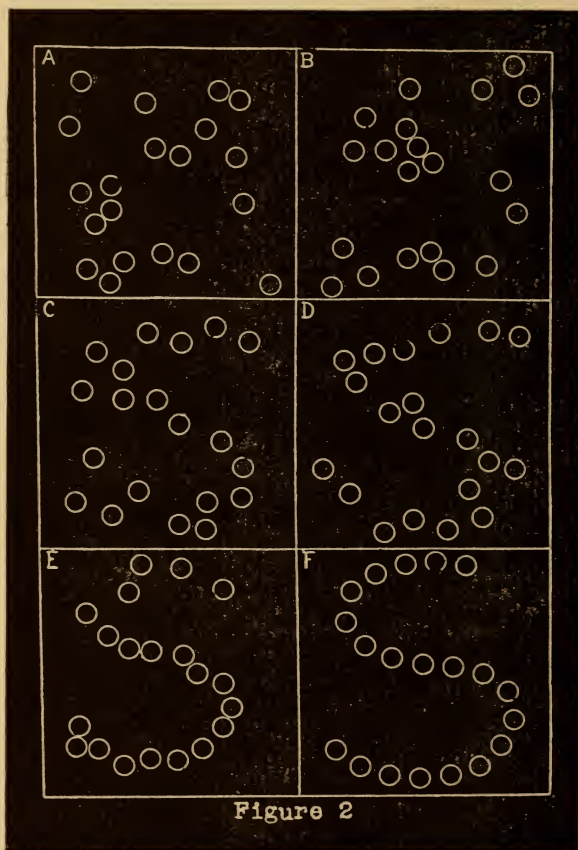
From this it follows, of course, that art works also possess a cycle of *resistance to reiteration* ("RON"), which is exactly concurrent with the cycle of complexity, starting at low resistance to reiteration, when the complexity is low (at and near A), advancing to high resistance to reiteration when the complexity is high (at and near B) and declining again to low resistance to reiteration when the complexity is low (at and near C).

Although the cycle of complexity has areas of simplicity at each end of the cycle, and although both these simplicities share the attribute of causing low resistance to fatigue (and rapid tiring) there is a difference of flavor between them. The simplicity of the overtaking period is a simplicity of mixed-up-ness and the simplicity of the leaving-behind period is the simplicity of understoodness.

This describes the mere mechanical and emotional characteristics of the cycle. In order to perceive the accuracy of this description — in order to satisfy ourselves that man's feelings actually pass through this cycle — let us study his reaction to an individual art work — say Poet and Peasant Overture. It starts at infancy as a mere sensation of "noise" meaning no more to him than any other combination of sound vibrations — such as shoes squeaking or the wind blowing. It gives stimulation to only a limited section of his nervous sys-

tem. He is completely unable to coordinate the various relations of pitch and rhythm, and they accordingly possess to him a high simplicity (or low complexity) of mixed-up-ness — exactly analogous to the mixed-up-ness which an "advanced" musical composition — such as *Afternoon of a Faun* — possesses to the musical semi-cultured. Gradually, however, as his capacities are expanded, as he learns to distinguish between a high note and a low note, and to observe effects of tempo and accent, the sensation of mere noise (or mixed-up-ness) is reduced and his mind occupies itself with subsidiary perceptions along varied and changing channels. And at a certain later moment when this emotional diffusion is at its highest, when his perceptions are branching out to their greatest distribution and exploration, at that moment Poet and Peasant Overture has attained, for him, the high point of its complexity. Thereafter, as he acquaints himself with still more advanced musical combinations, the composition moves further into the leaving behind period, towards the simplicity of understoodness. Mentally, he learns to say to himself, "that's just Poet and Peasant Overture again." The minimum of complexity is being approached and the cycle of complexity is nearing its completion.

From a visual aspect the six arrangements of circles in Figure 2 constitute a summarizing of this complexity cycle. Arrangement A represents complete mixed-up-ness, or zero complexity. The observer responds to it as he would respond to a "book" which had been produced by a random selection of words out of the dictionary. He is unable to read anything into the arrangement. No complexities enter, and the sensation remains merely a sensation of confusion. With arrangement B, however, he begins at least to observe certain clues and hints as



to future possibilities. These clues reduce the sense of the mere reiteration of an unchanging mixed-up-ness, and consequently lessen the mental fatigue. With arrangements C or D the previously seen clues justify themselves, and he reaches the high point of complexity. His mind is fully occupied by numerous and interesting points of observation tending towards a certain design and purposefulness which for the first time becomes perceptible as a whole — namely a relation to the letter S. Let it be remembered that the high complexity here attained is not due to the full and unquestioned perception of the letter S, but to the perception of a multitude of interesting evidence pointing to that perception. In fact as soon as the perception is too easily perceived as in arrangement E, and still more in arrangement F, the leaving-behind has begun and complexity declines towards the simplicity of understoodness.

All art works traverse this cycle, although with varying degrees of manifestation of the process. In general it can be said that in art works in which we feel most strongly that they are *individually man-created* — as for example II Penseroso or Firebird Suite — we also feel most strongly the existence of the cycle. As the art work becomes less individually-made and more aggregately-made or machine-made or nature-made, as for example a piano, a house, an automobile, a diamond ring, a pair of shoes, a block of granite, a snow storm or a mountain range — the cycle becomes less and less demonstrable. But it never completely vanishes. There is always a sufficient residuum of man-creation, even if only of a *composite man-creation by all mankind* through the “knowledge” or associations mankind has supplied, to furnish the rudiments of a cycle.

In addition to the variation in the degree of their

clarity, complexity cycles also differ in the length of time required for man to pass through them. Those of the alphabet, of "Jack and Jill", and of Chopsticks are quite rapidly passed through, early in life. Those of short division, "A Bicycle Built for Two", "Little Women" are travelled later. And so on. Those examples of art which we call "masterpieces" require such extreme progressions towards complexity before they can be comprehended that many intelligent men live their entire lives without getting beyond the overtaking period in relation to them, and it is perfectly possible that many centuries will elapse before any large proportion of mankind will be capable of reducing them to a low complexity of understoodness.

However this does not accord any miraculous and superhuman qualities to these "masterpieces", any more than Mount Everest is completely differentiated from other mountains by the fact that, at this writing, no man happens to have ascended to its summit.

It is also true that in the process of passing consciously and intentionally through the complexity cycle of one art work we are unconsciously making progress through others either because there are resemblances between them or because we are merely sharpening our minds, so to speak. In learning to appreciate *Old Man River* we are simultaneously learning to appreciate *Peer Gynt*, and vice versa. In learning to appreciate *The Honorable Peter Stirling* or *Hearts and Flowers* we are making it easier to traverse the complexity cycles of *Astronomy* and *Compleat Angler*. No complexity cycle can be an outright substitute for another, however; no matter how much more advanced it may be. A thorough understanding of all the greatest operas or symphonies, for example,

does not confer a complete understanding of *Aloha Oe*, *Two Guitars* nor *My Man*.

From this examination I believe it is clear just what culture does for the individual man, and how it affects his perception of beauty. It merely furnishes him, for each particular art work, an intermediate period during which that art work has a high complexity and loses its beauty slowly, as contrasted to previous and subsequent periods of low complexity, during which it loses its beauty rapidly. Inasmuch as during this intermediate period the world probably continues along its habitually even course and makes no special effort to increase man's opportunities for perception of that art work in response to his greater desire for those opportunities — and in fact could hardly be expected to do so considering the fact that as many persons might be outside this intermediate position as within — it follows that that art work tends to maintain, in relation to him, a higher level of beauty due to under-perception, than it otherwise would.

This is what culture does, no more. It's an interesting accomplishment, an important accomplishment, but it's not the marvelously romantic and glamorous accomplishment that our extreme aesthetes would have us believe. It does not represent a penetration by these aesthetes into some hallowed and mystic shrine that belongs to them exclusively. Others probably have been there before, and it will not be long before the main herd will be trampling its precincts in the manner of tourists at Blarney Castle.

* * * *

Next to "beauty", there is no word in current aesthetics more misleadingly used than "unity". By its dictionary definition it manifestly means practically the same as simplicity; in which case, of course, it would

have exactly the opposite effect than that usually attributed to it. It would tend to reduce rather than increase an art work's endurance.

Actually, however, critics and artists employ the term to mean what I call the *high point of complexity*, as expressed by the point marked B in the complexity cycle. In his strivings for "unity" (or more correctly complexity) the artist must achieve mere hints and approaches to unity, *from as far off as possible*, rather than unity itself. His mind must be engaged in a multiplicity of emotions whose coordination he by no means fully understands. If he did he would be a mechanic rather than an artist. He feels possibilities in what he is doing; he gropes toward a goal which he dimly perceives; and he consequently produces an art work which represents his furthest possible penetration into complexity — and his furthest movement *away* from simplicity — away from emotions which he would be capable of joining together into unity. If he is a "genius" then clearly that penetration is notably beyond that which other men have made in the same direction. And the distance of that penetration is sometimes an approximate gauge as to the length of time other men will need to equal that penetration.

* * * *

There is another vital point about complexity and its cycle which I also wish to bring out, and that is the way mankind as a whole — from the numerical viewpoint of population — are grouped about the complexity cycles of various art works and how the manner of their grouping affects the problems of distribution.

I have already said that there are early cycles and late cycles, and of course an even progression of cycles of varying degrees of earliness and lateness between the two extremes. It will be enough for my purpose how-

ever, to study only three of these cycles, an early cycle, a medium cycle and a late cycle. From these three we can easily establish the principles which, by minor allowance and adjustment, will apply to all.

Consider first, Figure 3. This is the visualization of the cycle of art work "Chopsticks". Clearly it is an extremely *early* cycle. By the age of fifteen the vast majority of civilized mankind have ascended the overtaking period, passed through the point of highest complexity (perhaps at the age of ten, for a guess) and are deep in the leaving-behind period, towards the simplicity of understoodness. To indicate this general position of adult mankind in relation to Chopsticks, I have appropriately placed a group of "marks" along the perimeter of the cycle each "mark" supposedly standing for certain large quantities of men; many millions or more. From this grouping it is clear that the problem of giving proper distribution to art work, "Chopsticks", is a comparatively easy matter. Humanity as a whole is in almost complete agreement that "Chopsticks" has both a low complexity, and a low resistance to reiteration. Permit men to have perception of this art work once a year for a few seconds, say, and all will probably be well. Nobody will have cause to complain. Or if Chopsticks itself is not available, some simple little jingle of similar flavor will often do just as well. When an art work is reduced to such a high degree of the simplicity of understoodness that a negligible amount of time is required to keep it at the indifference level nobody is much concerned if it becomes mislaid. And if a hunger eventually develops for it, it is frequently easier to create another art work in the same flavor than to make a protracted search to recover the original one. This accounts for the phenomenon of so-called "popular art" going into ob-

livion, about which our critics make so great a to-do, as though it were a subsidence which were not eventually to come to all art works.

Population Groupings, About Early, Medium and
Late Complexity Cycles

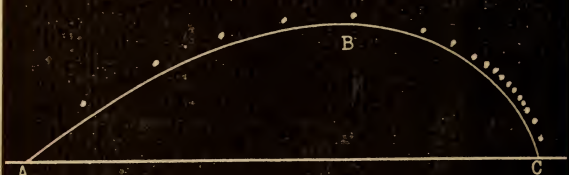


Fig. 3: Early Cycle, Chopsticks



Fig. 4: Medium Cycle, William
Tell Overture

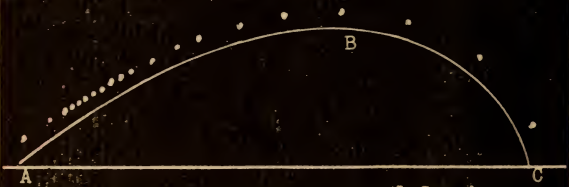


Fig. 5: Late Cycle, Pastoral Symphony

Figure 4 is the visualization of the cycle of "William Tell Overture". We will call this a *medium* cycle, and it presents us with a radically different situation. As you can see by the grouping of mankind along this cycle I imagine that there exists a wide difference of opinion as to this art work's complexity.

Perhaps the majority of men see this composition as a high complexity and therefore have a desire for frequent renditions of it. But there is also a sizeable minority consisting first of musically uneducated men to whom it possesses a low complexity of mixed-up-ness and second of musical connoisseurs to whom it possesses a low complexity of understoodness. Both these minorities will therefore favor, though for reasons which they would explain in different terms, infrequent rendition of the composition. To give complete satisfaction here is clearly a distributional problem of great difficulty. The infrequent and short perceptions which gave satisfaction in the case of "Chopsticks" would not do at all; nor would any other single rate of perception. Some means for varying the rate of perception in relation to the individual would have to be invented.

And finally, Figure 5 is the visualization of the cycle of Pastoral Symphony, which we will characterize as a *late* cycle. In this case we have a decided concentration of average men who see this art work as a simplicity of mixed-up-ness and therefore desire only infrequent renditions. There is, however, a considerable minority of musical connoisseurs who desire more frequent renditions of it. Ordinarily we might say that since they were in the minority they would have to overcome this situation by their own special efforts, but the case is somewhat complicated by the fact that these connoisseurs act, we might say, as scouts and pioneers for the rest of us and should

therefore be encouraged and assisted in their explorations in order that art works of higher complexity will be ready and in stock when we are prepared for them.

It is these cycles of complexity, early, medium, late; these constant variations in individual man's resistance to the reiteration of individual art works, and the problems of adjusting our methods of distribution to allow for them, that give us varying effects of beauty, that make life complicated, that render difficult the efficient management of art in relation to art's objective of longevity and simultaneously lend a tremendous scope and interest to improving that management.

Chapter VII

LIMITATIONS OF COMPLEXITY

FROM our knowledge of what complexity, or culture, does — from our realization that all art works pass through a complexity cycle, some early in man's life and some late — it is clear that many of the things which have been said about beauty we must learn to say about complexity. Complexity comes much closer to being the steadfast concept which man has been imagining beauty to be, than beauty itself does.

Emotionally, beauty is an important factor — tremendously important. But there is a primitive and rudimentary force to it which gives it an invulnerability to analysis similar to that which space, mass or electricity seem now to possess. We can discuss its adjuncts — its causes and effects — but we cannot analyze its own essence. Intellectually, therefore, it is not so rewarding to critical discussion as complexity. And failure to perceive that fact is one of the main reasons for the tremendous barrenness and ineptitude of present-day writing on art. Our critics are like those bulls in the ring whom we see so infatuatedly goring the red flag, when as far as definite results are concerned, their efforts should be devoted to the toreador. They are wearying themselves — and us — in senseless and heavy handed probings of an evanescence, as impervious to their efforts as the will-o-the-wisp. To be the first correctly to assess this or the other art work's loveliness — that seems to be their greatest ambition. A failure properly to estimate

the exact degree of eternal pulchritude in Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, in Berlioz' *Fantastic Symphony*, in an abstraction by Kandinsky, or a sculpture of Epstein supposedly brands the agent of that failure with a scholastic black mark which will travel down the ages against his name. Conversely, let him be the earliest to have proclaimed the enduring joy obtainable from the productions of Ibsen, Debussy or Cezanne, and his fame, it would seem, is assured for all time.

It is difficult to choose a strong enough epithet to describe this transmogrification of what at best can be only good or bad guesses into acts of transcendental import. The erection of a national monument to the winner of a sweepstakes or the infliction of forty lashes on the unfortunate backer of the wrong horse in the Kentucky Derby would be deeds of a corresponding degree of puerility. The only citation which could honestly be recommended for either the winner or the losers in such aesthetic beauty contests would be the general citation of all of them jointly, for imbecility in even participating in the effort — much as we would confidently bestow a similar award on men who consulted the stars as to their stock market operations, whether they made money from the operations or not. Art works do not contain an explosive charge of loveliness which goes off like a firecracker when the correct button is touched, in some such manner as Brunhilde awakes at Siegfried's kiss. They possess, as I have said, merely cycles of complexity which must progressively be traversed — usually with considerable travail and effort; and whether or not any poignant beauties are or are not sensed during the process is a question solely of distributional accident, depending upon whether the rate of perception of the art work is more than or less than the art work will pleasurably sup-

port in relation to what its resistance to reiteration is, at that stage of the cycle of complexity. So far as practical experience is concerned, I would say that the process of learning to appreciate a complex art work is emotionally disagreeable. Occasional sensations of gratification are felt, but they are usually more than offset by the exertion of scrutiny. Furthermore these gratifications are frequently of a type for which we can hardly give the credit to the art work — but are much more self-congratulations for the searcher's persistence in a difficult task, similar to that of the school boy who completes his algebra problem despite his greater desire to play baseball. Later on, genuine enjoyment from the art-work may be sensed but this happens only when there has been sufficient abstention to enable its stimulations to have built up again the observer's untiredness of them which had previously been lost through the stress of investigation.

To put it bluntly, the main function of the critic, *from the angle of scholarship*, is not to render dogmatic and eternally correct verdicts of an art work's so-called "art", but to narrate his adventures in exploring and ascending its cycle, to recount his failures and successes — his final discovery, perhaps, of a clue here and a clue there that might help him respond complexly to the art work's emanations. Or if all his searches unearth no clues, then he can in such manner report the paths which he painstakingly but unsuccessfully investigated, that his failures will be either an indication that no complexities are available or a challenge for others to continue the search with different formulas or in other directions. For it must be remembered that failure to discover complexity does not necessarily imply lack of insight. By no means can all mixed-up-ness be regarded simply as

undiscovered complexity — at least, not so far as consciously-created art works are concerned. The complexities must actually have been infused by the art work's creator. Otherwise, when what has once been a mere mixed-up-ness shall later prove to be a tremendous complexity, we shall have no right to deny that it might have been unconsciously created by a complete simpleton who merely scratched into it random multiplicities, haphazardly and by accident.

To expect a critic, after one attendance at a concert, after one visit to an exhibition of paintings, after one reading of a book, to reach a decision as to the complexity of the art works he has experienced — assuming that they are the products of men of talent — is as ridiculous as to expect him to learn Sanskrit over night, regardless of how great his linguistic aptitudes may be. And if you remind me that critics have certain specialties in the arts, and should consequently be capable of correct appraisal within those specialties, I can merely respond that any subdivision of art you may care to name has the same infinity of elements as life itself and that consequently a specializing in it must be in an extremely limited and illusory sense. Appraisals may be written, true. Under the present structure of society they are expected, and frequently useful. But their tone, their language, their point of view must be completely changed.

Let it not be thought that this statement contradicts my earlier declaration that art works possess a degree of complexity in themselves, and that this complexity can be definitely fixed within a scale of complexities. I only desire to bring out that it frequently requires a great deal of patient and prolonged examination to determine this degree of complexity. It is here in *complexity* that the

famed "test of time" has a possible pertinence, and not in *beauty*. And although I do not deny the difficulties in appraising an art work's complexity — that is, although I do not deny the difficulties in delineating its complexity cycle in relation to what we may term an "average man" — nevertheless I assert that it has successfully — though by approximation been done with a very large proportion of art's present store of exemplars. I cannot imagine that there will now be any very radical re-estimates of the complexity of the musical compositions of Bach, Beethoven or Johann Strauss, of the writings of Moliere, Shakespeare, Poe, Keats, Thackeray or Longfellow, of the paintings of Velasquez, Rembrandt or Ingres. For all these art works and a multitude of others the complexity cycles are fairly clearly drawn. The rate of progress through them by an individual man could probably be predicted if we knew in advance his intellectual attainments and the amount of time and effort he cared to expend in the process — just as we now know how rapidly school children will master long division, plane geometry and the elements of physics or chemistry. Or to risk a bold generalization, we should be able to classify the complexity of art works according to the mental ages at which man might be expected to attain the high point of their complexity; as *Puss In Boots*, *Oh Susannah*, 8 to 14; *Treasure Island*, Fildes' *The Doctor*, *Charley's Aunt*, 15 to 19; *Skaters' Waltz*, *Doctor in Spite of Himself*, *The Broken Pitcher* by Greuze, *Charge of the Light Brigade*, 20 to 29; *Framley Parsonage*, *Lilliom*, *Importance of Being Earnest*, *The Raven*, Swift's *A Modest Proposal*, *Raymond Overture*, *Tales of Hoffman*, *Laughing Cavalier*, 30 to 49; *Madame Bovary*, *Le Misanthrope*, *The Night Watch*, *Swann's Way*, *King Lear*, *Til Eulenspiegel*, *Tristan and Isolde*,

50 to 70; and so on. If so mathematical and prosaic a cataloguing seems shallow and even erroneous, I can only say that I regard art works as humanly created, and for that reason entirely subject to human appreciation. No doubt humanity will occasionally run off on wrong tracks which — when the fact is discovered — will quite rapidly cause a complexity collapse of certain art works. This is especially true in literature where progression along the paths “logical reasoning” and “scientific knowledge” have pertinence. Treatises based on such discredited theories as alchemy, or on prognostications delivered by departed spirits, or on mental telepathy have rather suddenly collapsed to a simplicity of understoodness out of proportion to the complex structure which their adherents originally raised. Much of present-day art criticism is destined for a similar sharp slump in its complexity, as the misconceptions on which it is founded become more widely realized. This does not mean that the really amazing subtleties which criticism sometimes has recorded are valueless. It simply means that their contributions should be transferred to another purpose.

In this light, let us consider a comment by Miss Edith Sitwell on Shelley’s poem, *Love’s Philosophy*, as follows:

“This poem, one of the most beautiful in our language, is technically miraculous. Those sounds of sparkling water rippling and falling together are gained in part by the absence of any words beginning with a hard consonant (excepting in the second verse, the words *Brother*, *clasp* and *kiss* — these being given to add ecstasy to the sweetness of the music) partly by the almost invariable use of female rhymes in the first verse The effect is gained, too, by the exquisite and flawless interweaving of two-syllabled words and one-syllabled words”.

The objection to this criticism is that it confuses the two factors, beauty (or pleasure) and complexity. Such words as sparkling, rippling, ecstasy, exquisite, etc., would suggest that Miss Sitwell was concerned with a question of *pleasure*. Actually, however, she was discovering clues to the *complexity* of the poem. She was observing Shelley's skill in so diversifying his techniques that no one of them would become too obvious or monotonous. *In principle*, there is nothing new in this policy of variegation. It has been employed by every artist since the beginning of time. Each specific application of the principle, however, whether large or small, must be a step forward from previous applications if it is to make progress towards complexity. What Miss Sitwell calls, for example, "the flawless interweaving of two-syllabled and one-syllabled words", no doubt was an important skill (or complexity advance) when introduced by Shelley, and the perception of it by Miss Sitwell constituted for her an overtaking of his complexity and a coming up even with it. Doing so was one incident in her traversing of the poem's complexity cycle. From the point of view of pleasure, on the other hand, this "flawless" interweaving is nevertheless by no means flawless in any practical sense of the word — any more than was the device (of interweaving or whatever else it may have been) which Shelley bettered or superseded. There is a continuous tendency for other poets ("lesser" poets if you wish so to term them) to imitate devices originated by their predecessors — often, it must be admitted, with the assistance of critics such as Miss Sitwell who point the way — and thus eventually to defeat the purpose of the devices, and cause them, by excessive use, to become the *opposite* of flawless.

Nor is the procedure even the exclusive property of

the fine arts. Essentially it is exactly analogous to the process by which any industrial product you care to mention — a printing press, a locomotive, a washing machine, a telescope — improves and becomes more complex by the introduction of innovation after innovation — each innovation, as it is absorbed into practice, furnishing the impulse and the opportunity to contrive something newer and more complex. No matter what the field of human activity is in which this progress manifests itself it is still merely one form of man's basic and ever-continuing *urge to complexity*, intended to introduce into his life art works or experiences of a greater resistance to reiteration than those which are already there.

Obviously, therefore, if art critics insist upon delivering positive verdicts, it is in the realm of *complexity* that they should indulge that yearning. Here they admittedly have a foundation of some solidity — resting on the established complexity-cycles of a large quantity of the older art works. And in relation even to a newer art work, there is no reason why, after they have made a sincere effort to transform as much of its mixed-up-ness as possible into complexity, they should not venture a decision on that complexity. In doing so they are at least announcing a decision which is logically decisionable; they are at least assigning a position to a thing which eventually, and with some stability, will *occupy* a position even if not exactly the position predicted. And above all, they are *not* assigning a position to an art work in a scale (as of beauty) where it will *never* occupy a fixed position, but will move freely up and down the scale, at random, with practically no fixity whatever; completely subject to casual accident.

It must not be concluded from anything I have said that complexity is more important than simplicity. Com-

plex art works are more difficult to organize, more difficult to produce again if destroyed and consequently less numerous. If all art works were assembled into a triangle which was bisected half-way between its base and apex, the complex art works could be imagined as occupying the small upper segment, and the simple art works the large lower segment. If from the upper segment we should remove and destroy the hundred art works which were the most complex, and therefore could support the greatest duration of contemplation; and simultaneously remove from the lower segment an equal number of art works which were the most simple, and therefore could support the least duration of contemplation; it is manifest that the removal of the complex art works would be important where as the removal of the simpler ones would not be greatly felt. There are, we might say, billions of these simple art works and the disappearance of a few would hardly be noticed.

But please notice that the above test was made on a strictly numerical basis. Suppose, instead, we compare the relative effects first of removing the entire body of art works in the upper section of complexity and then the entire body of art works in the lower section. Under such a procedure I imagine the effects, though different in flavor, would be equal in force.

Complexity, true, is the medium through which art enlarges itself by extending further towards the unexplored. It rescues us from being hemmed in. It saves us from an eventual imprisonment in the pattern of equal beauty. But there is a sense of mental striving and stress in it from which the only relief is simplicity. After the complexities of Ibsen, Proust, Brahms, Eliot, Hopkins, Abstractionism or a view in the alps, how relaxing are Micky Mouse, Robinson Crusoe, Parade of the Wooden

Soldiers, a "pretty picture" and the calm of the prairie.

Furthermore it is from the realm of simplicity that all our intense enjoyments are derived. Nothing imparts such extreme pleasure as the rapid assuaging of some elementary impulse which happens, by abstention, to have built up a high untiredness. Complexity never confers any such largess. Its mere diffusion accounts for that. Also the mathematical principle of chance is an additional deterrent. It is frequently possible to select for perception some *simple* art work which will give a very liberal (though short-lived) measure of enjoyment. But it is much more difficult to select a complex art work which will produce the same result, because the complex art work (by definition) activates a multiplicity of emotions, all of which must be accepted if any are accepted, and the chances of its bestowing an unadulterated pleasure are consequently reduced. A world from which all the thrills of simplicity were eliminated, and in which there remained only the deliberations and intellectualities of an afternoon in the library, would be a world from which an important influence towards longevity had been taken away.

The important thing to remember is that complexity and beauty are two separate concepts.* To mix the functions of one with the other is as destructive of intelligent understanding as to mix the functions of two such concepts, say, as size and weight. It is true that if we should pick out from any one hundred random objects the ten objects which were the largest, we would perhaps miss by

*For example, Albert C. Barnes in *The Art in Painting* says that Soutine's "extreme preoccupation with color, absence of the deep space required for monumental effects and his habitual inability to organize the plastic units, exclude all but a few of his best pictures from the highest range of art". The observations here noted are data for making a complexity-appraisal and not for estimating the heights of art that have been attained.

not too great a margin simultaneously picking out the ten objects which were also the heaviest. But would any man in his senses maintain that this result warranted the adoption of size as a test of weight, or justified us in saying that size and weight were the same thing. Yet it is exactly that kind of error which our aestheticians are continually and obstinately and nauseatingly making today. The complexity, or high resistance to reiteration, of an art work is its Beauty, when saying so happens to suit them. At other times the pleurability of an art work is its beauty. And it is by this fantastic evasion of facts that they are supposedly "giving standards" to criticism and thereby avoiding chaos!

If a critic's beauty appraisal always represented the degree of his complexity or culture — that is, if the "ordinary man" inevitably arrived at that same appraisal when he acquired that same degree of culture — then such an appraisal might be useful. But that is not the case, because there is always the fatigue pattern on hand capable of reversing the appraisal, no matter how much acumen had been employed in making it. The fatigue pattern has a perpetual veto power on every final beauty appraisal, analogous to that which a balance-scale would have in relation to the weight of objects which had been guessed at — as above mentioned — on the mere evidence of their size.

This fact can with especial vividness be made apparent to us if we should imagine all men in the world as somehow possessing exactly the same degree of complexity — as all having somehow acquired the ability to appreciate with the same fullness any art work which was presented to them. Under such circumstances, of course, all these art works would have the same resistance to reiteration in relation to whatever individual happened to observe

them. That is to say every man in the world would tire of art works A, B, C, D and so on, at the same rate of tiring as every other man, although the rates would differ as between the art works. There would be no disputes by men as to the complexity of art works — no disputes about “culture” or “good taste” — and consequently the relative beauty (or pleasurability) of art works would depend entirely on how frequently or intensely the individual was ordained to encounter them — would depend on how tired or untired of them he chanced to become. Nobody could possibly pretend otherwise. And the situation is not in any way altered by the fact that men differ in complexity, nor by the fact that art works have varying resistances to reiteration. The situation merely becomes more difficult to perceive, just as the effect of tossing a pebble into the sea (though always identical) becomes more difficult to perceive when the surface ceases to be calm and becomes rough.

And to attempt to nullify this point by alleging that the beauty-appraisals of “competent critics” *usually* are correct, and that this ought to be enough, simply brings us exactly to one of the main themes of this book — namely that aesthetics is founded on *probabilities* and that it can only become an honest and helpful profession by frankly acknowledging the fact.

Chapter VIII

PROBABILITIES OF BEAUTY

A CHARACTERISTIC of what we term "substantial people" is the high rigidity of their principles. When, after careful thought, they have reached a certain conclusion, they cling to it with a tremendous tenacity. And if asked, say, to account for their "success in life" they often attribute it to the adage, "make sure you are right and then go ahead."

I am not in any way disparaging men of this inclination. Their accomplishments have been notable. They are the counterparts of everything that is direct, unbending and purposeful — of the key-stone and steel rail, among fixed things, of the rocket, the moth and the bull dog, among those which move.

Practically speaking, however, they are likely to get us into trouble. To make sure you are right and then go ahead is a maxim which *if strictly adhered to* leads to such a prolongation of making sure that no time remains for converting the result into action. All the world's man-hours would be devoted to thinking and none to doing.

For such a policy is clearly based on the belief that there are such things in life as *certitudes* and that man — once he has found them — can thereby unerringly lay out his course of action. Unfortunately certitudes don't exist, except in the imaginations of those who make a living from the pretense of having discovered them. There

are approximations to them, true, but that is all. And it is upon these approximations — some close and some remote — that man is endeavoring to guide himself. In every moment of his life he is merely making guesses* — good ones and bad ones — and being faced continually with the problem of whether to spend a little more time trying to decide which is the better policy to adopt or take a chance and get along with his business.

What I have above termed the “substantial” man, therefore, is merely the man who has ventured his guesses early in life (usually guesses that are in wide favor at the time) and goes on from there without further hesitation or check-up. At the other extreme, forever revising or abandoning his conjecture, forever testing and experimenting with new ones, is the enthusiast, the faddist, the gambler, the showman, the opportunist, often the artist, sometimes the genius.

Even the rather formal endeavor we call “science” is built merely on the closest approximations to certitudes we can attain — on *high probabilities*, that is, which have maintained their high probability so long and unfailingly that we accept them as certitudes. The regular recurrences of day and night, the temperature at which water boils, the basic characteristics of animals, the saltiness of salt, the molecular composition of chemicals, and so on, have maintained themselves with such consistency that we assume they will continue in the same manner, although any one of them could readily enough be changed, as scientists themselves concede, by a number of easily-envisaged eventualities.

I have brought out these points, of course, because I have been emphasizing throughout this book that the proper foundation of aesthetics is probability, and be-

*like the one here enunciated.

cause I wish to demonstrate that the founding of it on so seemingly variable a concept does not constitute an abrupt separation of aesthetics from science, but rather a tapering off from science into a less sharply defined field.

After all, if we very rightly demand for science at least a ninety per cent probability, what are we to do with eighty, seventy, sixty and fifty-one per cent probabilities? Are we simply to throw them away as of no value?

Are we to take no cognizance of the fact that clover usually has three leaves, but not always; that living organisms usually are made up of cells, but not always; that the child usually comes into the world sharply male or female, but not always; and so on.

Are we to discard all these inexact knowledges as being "idle gossip"? It may be true that we eventually will know enough to transmute their low-grade probabilities into higher ones, but that does not say that in the meanwhile we should ignore them. On the contrary there are a wide variety of important human activities — including aesthetics — where they can and should be profitably employed. One important proviso must be added however; that they be *conscientiously* employed. For it is a salient characteristic of probabilities that they lend themselves either to selfish or to unselfish exploitation — that they may be the foundation either for a benefaction or a swindle. Perhaps this may be less true of the *very high* probabilities, because they soon work themselves into generally accepted knowledge. They are easily recognizable and no outstanding abilities are needed for their comprehension; but among the lower probabilities there are tremendous requisitionings of man's capacities for study and analysis. Extreme skills

and aptitudes are necessary for correct estimatings; and the "professional", therefore, who has painstakingly and exhaustively explored the data — when he confronts the ordinary man, ignorant not only of what the probabilities are but even of whether any exist — is clearly under a strong temptation to use his special information dishonestly rather than honestly.

To illustrate, suppose we travel back in history and imagine that a small group of men had just discovered that from their knowledge of the sun's orbit, of latitude and longitude, of mountain barriers, of heights above sea level, of barometric pressure and so on they were able to draw many interesting deductions as to climatic conditions and make good guesses as to the weather, three, six or ten days ahead. Possessing this ability — and supposing for the sake of illustration that it was exclusively theirs, as it might easily be — they would have two courses open to them.

If they were open and above-board, they could share their knowledge with others and found the science — or semi-science — of meteorology. It is not a particularly glamorous activity. Its predictions are limited both as to time and to kind. But it is useful and honest — and by persevering study and research it can be immensely expanded.

If, on the other hand, they were of a less scrupulous nature, they could conceal the source of their knowledge, credit it to their "intuition", say, or their "emotional subtlety"; and, *with the likelihoods always working in their favor*, and provided that they did not press their advantages too far, establish themselves as authentic prophets.

Needless to say, there are plenty of people who would get much more satisfaction from participation in a dra-

matic and exciting adventure such as this than from being merely agents in the forecasting of the weather. The sense of disorder (or chaos) which is so disturbing to men of a dogmatic nature would be eliminated — on the surface at least — the insiders could pose as divinities rather than earthlings; and they would find a flattering and grateful audience in that large class of humanity who like to be talked down to and told what's what.

Obviously, what I am trying to bring out is that although in the above example the temptation was resisted, yet when a situation also involving the use of probabilities arose in aesthetics, it was not. The men who possessed the specialized knowledge in this case used it treacherously instead of uprightly; and founded a fraudulence instead of an honesty.

It may be true that they were never fully aware of the two choices that confronted them, and that they *drifted* into the transgression rather than elected it. It may be true that this temptation to go wrong was greater here than in meteorology because the prospects of bringing the imposture to a successful conclusion were better. But these apologies, even if we accept them as condoning the past, certainly do not justify the existence of the fraudulence at the present time nor its perpetuation into the future.

Aesthetics' wrong guesses, if man takes the trouble to investigate them, are very much more flagrant and damaging than those of the weather man, as is amply demonstrated in Henri Peyre's *Writers and Their Critics*, even though they are not so quickly or so baldly revealed. And there is the added sin in them of their being foisted on us by lies and treachery. Hypocritical glamorizings of "beauty", haughty repudiations of fatigue, pious appeals to that convenient concept called

culture, though they may contribute a labyrinth of mazes and blinds in which humbug can fight a prolonged, delaying battle, do not save the day. The cultured man who has "trained himself to appreciate" may often speak with greater authority than the amateur. Let him confine his pronouncements, however, within the precincts of that authority. Let him remember that the croupier, despite his thorough understanding of the intricacies of roulette, and the mathematician despite his ability to estimate the chances of holding a certain poker-hand can neither of them foretell the game's outcome.

No excessively arduous task is demanded of criticism in order that it regenerate itself and join the company of honorable undertakings; only that it acknowledge its own limitations and learn to be content within them; only that it start modestly, measure its appraisals in proportion to the probabilities on which they are based and extend them only as rapidly as its own increasing capacities and experience justify.

Although my comparison of aesthetics to meteorology is illustrative, it must be admitted that the probabilities which apply to aesthetics are more involved. The pertinent factors in meteorology are exclusively objective and never subjective. The sensations of warmth, wind, humidity and so on, are shared by all human beings with no important variations. Whereas in aesthetics there are equally numerous objective influences and the added complication of widely differing subjective reactions to them.

However the guiding policies remain identical: namely moderation and restraint. It cannot be definitely stated how far ahead man can venture to forecast the weather — perhaps he may do so for one, three or five weeks — possibly even longer in special cases. But under present

conditions we can quite confidently brand as a charlatan any man who forecasts sunny weather or rain (unless man-made) or heavy winds on individual days a year in advance.

Similarly in criticism no exact dividing line can be drawn to indicate when an appraisal ceases to be reasonable and becomes unreasonable. But when critics allege a certain painting to be eternally beautiful, characterize a musical composition as immortal or a poem as perfection or state *unqualifiedly* that one art work is *better* than another with no stipulations as to how long it will remain better or in relation to whom it is better, then we are being subjected to outright chicanery and clap-trap and there is no sense in pretending otherwise. Nor is there sense in doubting that criticism, as now being administered to us, consists ninety per cent of exactly this nonsensicality.*

Not only do seemingly intelligent and seriously-purposed men continue to render permanent evaluations of art works — apparently without the slightest thought that an analogy exists between themselves and the man who predicts a white Christmas for the year 2000 — but they indulge themselves in the most caustic sarcasms as to the “stupidity” and “blindness” of critics of fifty or a hundred years ago who failed to see how obviously trivial and ephemeral were the creations of A and B and how significant and enduring were those of C.

If they condemned these prognosticators, not for their guesses coming out wrong, but for having had the foolhardiness to make them in the first place, and if they had then proved their own good sense by refraining from

*When I make this statement I am referring to *criticism which criticizes* — which gives appraisals, that is — and not to criticism which is merely descriptive or analytic.

similar indiscretions, we could approve; but they don't do that. They scold and denounce — and then leap into the same mud puddle.

Even Henri Peyre after having painted the picture for us in all its ugliness is unable to resist its Medusan spell.

"It may seem one day unbelievable", he says, "that for ten years or more critics should have sung the praises of a charming talent like Virginia Woolf's, as if she had really given her characters life, and not just a blurred halo of fleeting gleams of consciousness. It may seem even more unbelievable that masters of colorful decoration like Van Gogh, Matisse and Gauguin himself should have been celebrated for thirty years as the equals of authentic geniuses".

Albert C. Barnes* says, "Matisse' painting lacks the deeper values, plastic and human, which arise from concern for the substance of things as well as their form. In the work of the great Venetians, and of Rembrandt, Renoir and Cezanne there is a profound conviction, a monumental character, a moving humanity of which Matisse has little or none."

C. J. Bulliet** says, "Degas, in his day, was esteemed above Daumier, but now he appears decidedly less. Toulouse-Lautrec may eventually, too, pass Degas in critical estimation Matisse and Picasso seem fairly sure of immortality."

How obsessed these men are with their shibboleths and divining rods — their phantasms of "authentic genius", of "deeper values", of "monumental character" by which they will tell the world's fortunes. One is reminded of the hollow-eyed fanatics who throng the

*in *The Art in Painting*.

**in *Apples and Madonnas*.

gambling rooms, paper and pencil in hand, trying to defeat mathematics with a "system".

Of course if these critics would preface their appraisals by saying "when I declare an art work to be beautiful I mean that *by and large, taking all present conditions into account*, the chances are that that art work will be pleasurable on its first impact (and perhaps occasionally thereafter) to any man who is intellectually capable of understanding it", under such circumstances we could regard them with some respect.

Do they ever do this? Never. Is there even the slightest hint that such a statement on their part is to be taken for granted, even if not put into words? Quite the contrary. Any notion of that kind is vehemently rejected by them as leading first to what they term "empty relativism", and after that to "chaos". The non-existence of this chaos I have already demonstrated.

Apparently no reasoned arguments nor amiable discussions will tempt them from their snug sanctuary and make upright men of them. They have survived too many such minor skirmishes in the past to be merely scuffled out. They must be exploded out.

* * * *

In contrast to the aesthetics built on a pretended solidity, what do we obtain from an aesthetics frankly founded on the shifting support of probabilities? Something much sounder and more satisfying, I assure you. Probabilities are only probabilities, true; and man must recognize them as such. When one fails him — as occasionally it will — he merely takes his stand on another one, with the relative calm — and the hope for better luck next time — that arises from having foreseen the possibility of such an occurrence. There is none of the anguish and sense of utter defeat which the collapse of

what he had regarded as a certitude inflicts upon him.

Now it is not my intention to devote any considerable part of this book to a cataloguing of the probabilities of beauty. There are far too many of them to justify any such attempt, and I think it should be the function and *pleasure* of the individual critic to hunt out and develop those which apply to the various situations which from day to day he may encounter.

Basically they arise from the fact that we are mortals instead of gods; and consequently unable to do things right. They are the result of distributive failures — the result of incapacity to give ourselves everything we want in exactly the right quantity and at exactly the right time and place.

They can be divided, however, into various categories, some of them mechanical, some psychological, some simple, some complex; some natural, some artificially created by various creeds and prejudices.

Perhaps the most obvious are the result of geographic location. If I know where a certain man lives, and what is the general radius and frequency of his travels, I can often conjecture from these facts alone what would be the beauty (or pleasurability) to him of a view from a high mountain, of a visit to Mont St. Michel, of the Sistine Chapel, of the Monte Carlo ballet, of a painting in Madrid or Vienna, of a composition by a Brazilian or Latvian composer or of a French or Italian novel. There would be other factors involved, naturally — such as his accessibility to these art works through the medium of photographs, of verbal descriptions, of mechanical reproductions and of translations as well as the degree of his intelligence and culture. But the mere situational data would always be at least a useful clue and in some cases an entirely sufficient one.

A second very apparent classification is by age. In relation to all persons eight to ten years old, for instance, an extremely good guess can be made as to the pleasurability of *Seven League Boots*, of *Beauty and the Beast*, of Walt Disney's *Donald Duck*, and of *Pop Goes the Weasel*.

In relation to all persons over thirty years of age an equally good guess of the pleasurability of these same art works can again be made, namely that they are all very close to the indifference level. Although either abstinences or surfeits could very easily alter this balance, they are not likely to occur in easily available art works of this kind.

Even in more complex cases the age factor is important. In relation to all persons not more than twenty years old it would be safe to predict — with a sixty to seventy degree probability — that *Scarlet Letter*, an abstraction by Paul Klee and Brahms' *Third Symphony*, if not initially disagreeable, would rapidly become so through the mere fatigue of trying to understand them without the mental experience to do it.

Economic differences produce another series of probabilities. A rich man who has an adequate collection of books, pictures and phonograph records, who possesses a billiard table, a bowling alley and a complete air-conditioning unit in his own home obviously develops an entirely different fatigue pattern, with its corresponding beauty-probabilities, than the poor man who has to make special and tiring efforts to acquire these advantages — or do without.

Selfishnesses, ambitions and greeds are responsible for further unevennesses. To be handsomer or more brilliant than others, to turn the tables on an opponent, to inherit a title of nobility or be accepted in exclusive social circles,

to become a celebrity, to set records for chastity, temperance or self-sacrifice — all these wishes and many others lead to beauty probabilities of which the vast majority of men are unable to obtain the resolution simply through the competition of their fellows.

Beauty probabilities of these four types are extremely general in their application. They run through all life. Of those which apply specifically to the art works of "fine arts", and the criticizing of them, there is also a plentiful supply. Important among them are those produced by the skill required in the process of creating the art works, by the shapes of the complexity cycles of individual art works in comparison to the complexity or culture of the person perceiving them, and by the distortions to men's natural response to art caused by white-feather aesthetics.

Skill becomes a factor simply because, by definition, it is difficult to be skilful; and because, consequently, the more skill that has gone into an art work the less common that art work (or one of equivalent skill) is likely to be and the more limited the opportunities of having perception of it. That, by itself, endows it with a considerable enjoyment-likelihood, at least to those persons capable of appreciating that skill.*

The complexity cycles of art works generate a multitude of important likelihoods, which come into force through the density of population-groupings along these cycles and through the shape and characters of the cycles themselves. Clearly if there is a concentration of a large majority of people at one part of the complexity cycle, the chances are that the distribution of the art work will be regulated to this majority; with the consequence that

*But this does not justify using skill as a test of beauty, as is so often done. No matter how great the skill, man may be surfeited of it.

minorities at other parts of the complexity cycle will be subjected either to over- or under-perception of that art work. Furthermore there are early cycles, with short and easy slopes and late cycles with long and intricate slopes. Of the late and more difficult slopes some have already been traversed by students, and the story of their doing so is available in printed criticism for the convenience of whoever wishes to follow along the same path. Others are virgin territory yet to be explored, and perhaps have not even been envisaged as requiring exploration.

Another series of beauty-probabilities I call artificial; because they are obsessive rather than spontaneous, because they would never have existed but for the threats and fulminations of a criticism depending for its authority on pretence and prevarication, instead of on deliberation and good judgment. They show up in little niggling bigotries, hates and prejudices which spread from man to man like measles or ring worm. And those who are the victims of one or the other of such ailments, instead of seeing them for what they are, actually regard them as desirabilities and join with their fellow sufferers to spread the infection among as many others as possible.

For example, in the debate between two rival critics as to the relative merits of clarity and obscurity in literature to which I referred above, it is clear that they were not arguing what was simply an individual difference of opinion but that they represented hostile, populous and strongly partisan coteries, who looked on the outcome of the battle as a matter of real importance. This is apparent, I believe, from the rather sarcastic statement by one of them (the one supporting clarity) that a certain author's writings are "now very much in the intellectual fashion, presumably because he so loftily disdains syntax, grammar and punctuation".

What I wish here to emphasize is not the puerility of the entire squabble (that I think I have demonstrated) but the psychological distortion it induces in each person who allows himself to be drawn into the feud. His responses to an art work, either of pleasure or unpleasure, are no longer allowed their natural and healthful expression, but must be held back until he can analyze the art work and determine its "correctitude" on the basis of his individual belief. If it is sufficiently obscure — and he is an obscurist — he forces his enjoyment of it, because it justifies his dogma. If he is on the other side he fights his enjoyment of it because it *denies* his dogma. A completely unnecessary and obviously harmful stress and conflict are therefore continually stewing in his body and upsetting — like a dyspepsia — his taste and disposition. He is in the predicament of the statesman who cannot derive satisfaction from his country's prosperity because it was attained by following a course which he had declared would bring disaster.

And so on. All these probabilities of beauty — even those derived from bigotries — can be characterized in general terms as *natural*, because if not actually nature-made they are at least mass-made. No individual man created them out of his own fancy. They are the probabilities, obviously, from which criticism must obtain its main support. There is, however, another and by no means negligible type which carries on from the predominantly natural towards the more and more artificial and even to the fantastic. They have to be used with more caution than the natural — and the further from the natural they go the greater must be that caution. They are extremely revealing, however, for illustrative and explanatory purposes. The distinction between them can best be brought out by an examination of the stipu-

lations on which they are based. All probabilities are based on stipulations, as has been shown in the above given classifications*; but natural probabilities are based on natural stipulations and artificial probabilities are based on artificial stipulations. For example, to say that England will probably be warmer than Labrador is a natural probability based on the natural stipulation that the gulf stream will continue to flow near England's shores; whereas to say that Labrador *would* probably be warmer than England if the gulf stream were somehow diverted to Labrador's shores is an artificial probability based on an artificial stipulation.

There is one other interesting and important probability — based on the likelihood of resemblances to present-day art works being created in future years. I shall postpone its discussion, however, until the next chapter where it seems to come in more aptly.

* * * *

Although it can never be too greatly stressed that criticism must be founded on probabilities (whether natural or artificial) this does not mean that criticism will degenerate into a sort of mathematical guessing game deprived of imaginative concepts and leaving no scope for invention and flights of fancy. Actually it would be just the other way.

There are immensely richer resources in probabilities than in certainties. They are ductile and elastic — malleable to a myriad variant shapes. Suspense and surprises are latent in them like atomic energy in uranium. They haven't the deadness, inertness, rigidity of the inflexibly assured. Consider the piano. It is an organization of 88 certitudes — each one exactly true to pitch. Though

*that is, stipulations of geographic location, economic conditions, prejudices, etc.

pleasurable effects can be derived from the instrument, a certain coldness and artificiality nevertheless prevail. There are no genuine tremolos nor glissandos, no off-key, no diversions from orthodoxy. Its operators are eighty per cent technicians and only twenty per cent creators. How different, those instruments of uncertainty — the violin, the trombone, the clarinet, the trumpet, the saxophone and their like. What infinities of magnificent “wrongness” may be joined to their rightness. What opportunities for inspired misdemeanor. And the virtuosi who activate them, how completely free they are to range the whole domain of fantasy and invention.

Yes, probabilities are the stuff of which criticism should be constituted. Granting certain facts, assuming certain others, then beauty may be envisaged here rather than there. That’s legitimate. Infinities of pertinent, discerning — and enjoyable — commentary are feasible on exactly such a theme; with its variations. Categorical statements may be justified when dealing with immature mentalities in order to save bother — as we might tell a child “it’s not nice to stare” — but in relation to adults they are either ridiculous or insulting.

Chapter IX

CONSEQUENCES TO CRITICISM

ASSUMING that we abandon the aesthetic principles that are now current and adopt those advocated in this book, what happens?

In theory I have answered this question. We take into consideration the influence of tiredness in art; we openly identify beauty with pleasurability and study beauty's *fluctuations* as influenced by its distribution and its resistance to reiteration, instead of regarding it as an immutability; we make a sharp distinction between beauty and culture (or skill); and if we venture any appraisals of beauty we do so on the authority of probabilities rather than certainties; thus frankly accepting science's strategy of a continuing compromise with chaos (or with "nature") instead of the doctrinaire's naive pretense that he has eliminated it and established a system of complete order.

In general terms, this is well enough; but a little on the academic rather than the practical side. What would be the consequences in *everyday life*? That is more what we want to know.

At the lower grades of thought they might not be startling. Alterations in man's beliefs usually touch only the subtler and more obscure phases of his conduct. The innovations of Columbus, Darwin, Pasteur, Einstein and other pioneers, important though they were, left the surface fabric of existence largely unaffected. An indi-

vidual could be ignorant of what these men taught and yet not be greatly differentiated from his fellows. He could regard the earth as a disk rather than a sphere, for example, and still go efficiently about his ordinary affairs, take trips to foreign countries and even write a readable book concerning his travels. Evolution, relativity and the germ theory could be disregarded with equal impunity.

Similarly a critic, provided he confines himself to the routine pursuit of his profession, may adhere to a primitive and fallacious aesthetics and keep pretty well out of trouble. If his fatigue pattern conforms approximately to that which is currently prevailing he can issue merit-verdicts on the ordinary books, plays, and moving pictures of the day and hit it right, in relation to his readers, say seventy-five per cent of the time. There is a certain risk of exposure, true, but he is probably justified in believing that if he makes only one slip-up in four he can carry it off without much difficulty. The majority of men will still be on his side; and the dissenters very likely will conclude that something is out of kilter with their own perceptive apparatus, rather than with that of a man who is supposed to be an expert. So that on this rather elementary plane of operations, everybody gets along satisfactorily enough under the old system.

It must be remembered, however, that it is almost impossible for a critic of any calibre to stay at this low level, to maintain a fatigue pattern similar to that of his readers and to act, so to speak, as an automatic thermometer of beauty. The mere routine of his profession prevents any such retention of "normality". In his particular branch of art, whatever it is, he qualifies himself, as I have already said, by having perceived a *great many* exemplars in that branch of art, *very often*, and by hav-

ing consequently become exceedingly tired of an exceedingly large number of them — especially the more primitive and therefore more frequently encountered forms of them. And there is no escape from this fact, no matter how desperately critics seek to find one. What they like to call *good* taste is simply a *tired, jaded* taste, created by the mere accident of what kind of art they have collided with, in what quantity and in what intensity. By a process of specialization they have largely used up the resources in that area of specialization. As I shall explain later, this is not necessarily regrettable. Under Factual Aesthetics a tired taste is not a bad kind to *possess*. But that does not change what is here the basic point — namely that as soon as you bring critics of any ability into aesthetics the old system begins to break down.

For instance, George Jean Nathan, apropos of the Gilbert and Sullivan operettas, has written:—

“I obediently sit through them one after another and, while fully realizing the worth of most of them, no longer have much fun. This obviously, is an admission no critic should make. To be respected, a critic should pretend that he finds illimitable personal rapture in anything of unquestioned merit, even though he has seen and heard it more times than he remembers.”

Now this is a very frank and honest statement — and at the same time a depressing one. It reveals how abjectly a critic can be imprisoned by his own aesthetic superstitions. Here is a man who has perceived the fallacy of his own creed, who has even for a moment stepped out into the free world, and then — apparently intimidated by his aloneness and by the heresy he has dared utter — shrunk back again within his prison to the company and protection of his fellow-inmates. That weak back-sliding under the wing of orthodoxy shows, of

course, in his attributing of "unquestioned merit" to art works which clearly bore him to distraction, with no admission that there is anything illogical in doing so. If he should remain bored with them for the rest of his life, they presumably retain that merit. If all men in the world, shared his boredom, as they unquestionably would if subjected to the same surfeit as himself, still that merit persists. At least in Mr. Nathan's mind, boredom and unquestioned merit apparently can live together companionably in art works forever, world without end. One wonders what it is — if not boredom — that has brought to a conclusion the merit of other art works and forced them into the "oblivion", which critics with no visible sense of contradicting themselves, are so gleefully consigning them to for their supposed *lack* of merit.

Does the fact that men can cast back in their memories to a day when the Gilbert and Sullivan operas delighted them justify assuming that they still possess that merit? Evidently not, for then *everything* which at one time delighted them would also be of *unquestioned merit*. Does the fact that the operas might very easily regain their capacity to delight — through a sufficient abstention — enter into the situation? Again no, for the same could be said of *any* opera.

Or is it the extent of the *original* delight, or the fact that it stood up so well against reiteration which warrants the merit? Not at all; for neither the extent of the enjoyment or its lasting quality were necessary. Either one of them could have been prevented whether for all the operas together or for any single one you might select. To illustrate, suppose that the three operas *Mikado*, *Patience* and *Iolanthe* had been composed, not by Gilbert and Sullivan, but by some other composer, and had been abundantly rendered and re-rendered for say

thirty years, (sufficiently, that is, for Mr. Nathan to have attained his above mentioned weariness of them or more) and suppose that Gilbert and Sullivan — while Mr. Nathan (and all the rest of the world) were in this state of ennui — had then independently composed and produced *Pinafore*, isn't it obvious that despite its possessing certain newnesses of its own, its high resemblance to the other three operas would nevertheless be so apparent — its general style so repetitious — that it could only in part free itself from their lack of attraction? Not only would its "unquestioned merit" not be recognized but it would not be at all difficult — knowing critics and their propensities — to imagine the reviews it would receive — the banal preachments which would be emitted about the "folly of imitation" and about the "period of decadence which inevitably follows a golden age of artistic creation"; Gilbert and Sullivan being the decadents, naturally.

Situations such as this are not forced and artificial, as may seem at first glance. Innumerable art works have "failed" or have "succeeded" entirely by accident. If the particular aesthetic flavor which they dispensed chanced already to be in adequate supply they failed, no matter how many centuries man may have had to wait before that adequate supply arrived, and no matter how enthusiastically they might have been welcomed if they had appeared on the scene only a few years earlier. That's the "rub of life" those apparent "injustices." If there had been three Shakespeares before Shakespeare himself was born, it is entirely conceivable that *Hamlet*, *Twelfth Night*, *Macbeth* and the *Tempest* would now be forgotten. And to point out how unlikely it would be that there could have been such a profusion of men possessing Shakespeare's artistic genius simply brings out that it

is not Shakespeare's genius by itself which is the determining factor but the improbability of many men's possessing such genius. And yet a rapid succession, within a generation or two, of several men possessing extraordinary talents of a somewhat similar type to his is actually not more improbable than certain unusual sequences or turns in the throw of the dice which gamblers allege actually to have taken place in their own experiences. Instances of it might easily have occurred several times in the last hundred years, say; and might have caused extreme deformities or distortions in the shapes of men's fatigue patterns as compared to the shapes those patterns would have had under more "normal" circumstances and if this sudden surge of genius had not occurred. Art works which we now regard with considerable unconcern might easily have been acclaimed by critics as eternal masterpieces but for an accidental converging of great personalities in the same century instead of their more natural dispersal at widely removed eras.

Allow me twenty million dollars a year for fifty years and I will undertake so to reduce the "art" of Hamlet (and incidentally Shakespeare's prestige) that I doubt if it could ever be restored. I would do so not only by an excessive rendition of the play but by an encouraging of the production of high-degree likenesses to itself, and to its various themes and techniques. I would cause fatherly ghosts on the ramparts, inconsistent and indecisive introverts, simulated insanities, duels with poisoned rapiers and monologues questioning the charm of life to become commonplaces of literature. I would educate the public in the fine points of Shakespeare's versification, subsidize authors not only to employ this versification amply but to develop it to such complexity that the

degree of complexity attained in it by Shakespeare would become a relative simplicity. Do you question my ability to achieve this end, on the ground that Hamlet is "too great" ever to be closely approximated? The mere raising of that issue amounts to conceding the validity of my viewpoint; it amounts to an acknowledgment that if Hamlet *could* be approximated and in sufficient volume, then its supposed "immortality" would come to an end.

For obviously, the only way in which a White-Feather critic could be logically consistent — under his own principles — and continue to appraise Hamlet as an enduring masterpiece *which would be impregnable to my campaign against it* would be by holding that no matter how many men might create close approximations to Hamlet — even if there were a million of them — Hamlet would still retain its previous greatness; and by holding, besides, that all the close approximations to it would win degrees of greatness in relation to Hamlet's greatness corresponding to the closeness by which they approximated it.

And if the critic, having seen how difficult, if not impossible, it is to support such a contention, then shifts his ground and points to the extreme unlikeliness of such a thing happening, the only result is that he has thereby abandoned his own previous beliefs, acknowledged the sovereignty of Probability (and of Fatigue) and become an exponent of Factual instead of White-Feather Aesthetics. For manifestly it is just as damaging to his philosophy to concede that the beauty of art works can be reduced by the experiencing of art works *resembling* them as to concede that their beauty can be reduced by a reiteration of the original art works themselves. In fact even more damaging, perhaps; because

under such a theory the beauty of the Iliad, the Rubaiyat, Madonna of the Chair, Anatomy Class, Pomp and Circumstance and Leonore Overture could be lowered almost to the indifference level without man's ever having had actual perception of them. They might even conceivably approach close to becoming superfluities.

And it must be remembered that if close approximations have a diluting effect on beauty they have that same effect on "greatness" and on sublimity" and on "significance" and a number of other concepts considered factors in art. Greatness, Sublimity and Significance cannot be scattered wholesale through life without ceasing to be Greatness, Sublimity and Significance.

This entire subject of the way art works affect each other (and may even act as substitutes for each other) according to the degree of resemblance between them, could and should be an extremely important and interesting branch of criticism.

White-Feather critics naturally dodge it, however, because from their point of view it is irrelevant, or so they pretend. In fact they sometimes even go so far as to deny that resemblance exists or conceivably could exist. One of them* has said, for instance:

"Wuthering Heights has never been and can never be imitated; for it is organic and unique".

I don't think it is necessary to attempt any elaborate disproof of this allegation. Likenesses obviously do exist (even to *Wuthering Heights*) and the only questions are in the degrees of the likenesses and the probabilities of their occurring.

The resemblances can be distant and merely generic, as every painting to some degree resembles every other painting, because all (or nearly all) of them are color-

*Virginia Moore, in *The Life and Eager Death of Emily Bronte*.

tions of relatively small rectangular areas, and as every musical composition resembles every other because all are organized sound; or they can be near and specific as a landscape by Pissarro resembles one by Monet, or a symphony by Brahms resembles one by Beethoven.

There should, therefore, be no great difficulty in reaching a fair amount of agreement among connoisseurs — assuming they possessed an open mind on the subject — as to at least some of these resemblances as they now exist among present-day art works, and this in itself would be decidedly helpful.

For instance, if the critic chances to know that in the Tate Gallery in London there is a painting with a high degree likeness to a painting in the Frick Museum in New York this fact should be a pertinent factor in any guesses the critic should desire to make as to the beauty of either picture. Or even more decisive would be his knowledge that color reproductions of either one or both the pictures were in wide circulation at a low price. And this knowledge would be helpful even if the reproductions *at first* might tend to develop appreciation of the pictures and would only later tend to dull their charm.

As to the likelihood of resemblances of these same present-day works *turning up in the future*, and as to how close these resemblances might come, this clearly is a much more difficult problem. Nevertheless it is a problem in which much useful data, even if not always dependable, could nevertheless be gathered. Actually, there is no other basis upon which the contribution of an artist could be evaluated in relation to future eras. In fact, unless the critic had some idea in his mind as to whether, on the one hand, a flood of similar contributions would appear within the year or whether, at the other extreme, centuries might elapse before an artist

of comparable skill (in the like activity) would be born, his forecasts would have the same invalidity and coxcomberly as those by which white-feather critics are now insulting our intelligence.

In certain vocations it is not too difficult to make guesses as to the degrees of skilfulness which we can expect the men of new generations, as they come into the world, to possess in those vocations. To take a simple illustration, it is not too difficult, from an examination of the records which have been kept of batting averages in the game of baseball, to make a reasonably accurate estimate as to what percentage of our male population could attain batting averages in the two-hundred, three-hundred or four-hundred ranges. Sudden and extreme fluctuations in the physical qualities that determine batting skill, such as goodness of eye-sight, muscular development, speed of nervous response, etc., seem improbable enough so that we can predict with considerable confidence that Ty Cobb and Babe Ruth will be heroic figures for another twenty or fifty years, perhaps.

When we enter more intellectual fields the task becomes harder, of course. The resources inherent in man's brain, with its billions of cells, and the infinite number of directions in which its activities may turn, can only very rudimentarily be measured or anticipated, and exceptional cases are not only more frequent but less explicable. That does not deny, however, that there are still phenomena to be studied, long records to study from and valuable conclusions to be drawn.

Even in the fine arts, something can be accomplished. If Corot produced one thousand landscapes of which twenty-five hundred are in the United States (as the saying is) that is a clue as to the skill required to paint in his style. If Turner could paint a "good Rembrandt"

(as he did), if Prokofieff could approximate (in *Classical Symphony*) the music of Mozart and other composers of his day, if Van Meegeren could forge Vermeers well enough to deceive all the experts, then facts such as these (and others which critics can unearth), should form a basis — even if precarious — for us to make guesses as to whether the next one, two or three centuries will produce similarities to the art creations of Rouault, Degas, Modigliani, Joyce, Proust, Richard Strauss, Wagner, Moussorgski and Ravel which would be close enough similarities to cause a profound change in the probabilities of their beauty. I would be willing to venture the prediction, for illustration, that there would be a multitude of painters, in the next fifty years who could supply the world with high degree resemblances to the works of Mondrian, but very few if any, in the same period of time, who could paint pictures with nearly the drawing skill and inventiveness of subject which those of Salvador Dali display. My prognostication might prove to be wrong but at least it would have been based on rational grounds and not on fantastic romanticizings as to ideal and enduring beauty.

We are confronted, accordingly, with another important classification of probabilities of beauty (in addition to those discussed in the preceding chapter), the probability, namely, of the creation of future resemblances to our present art works, and of the degrees of those resemblances.

And we have been deprived, of course, of having intelligent speculation on this subject presented to our attention only because it is to the interest of criticism's "high priests" always to emphasize the notion of the uniqueness and unapproachability of what they call a "world genius". Doing so casts an aura of spirituality

and exaltation about their doings — enables them to talk down to us, as it were, from elevated and sublime areas which we not only could not attain but would be incapable of appreciating even if we did get there.

To make clear how this stratagem throws us off balance, let me suggest a certain mental experiment. Imagine that Shakespeare wrote only four plays — Hamlet, Julius Caesar, King Lear and Romeo and Juliet — and that the rest of his plays, including Othello, Anthony and Cleopatra, The Tempest, Merchant of Venice, Macbeth, Richard the Third, Midsummer Night's Dream, Twelfth Night, As You Like It and Winter's Tale, had been the creations of four other playwrights, two of them having lived a century earlier than Shakespeare and two of them a century later. Sociologically and biologically there is no reason why this could not have happened. No particular pattern as to the distribution of talent over the ages or through the population seems necessary. Nor, if it had happened, would there be any reason *aesthetically* to change our evaluation of the plays. They would all be there, just the same as before — just as "immortal, eternal and timeless", to employ the phraseology of our critics, as they ever had been.

And yet, subtly, indirectly, psychologically, there would have been *very decidedly* an alteration. Not only would we think less of Shakespeare, because there had been four other men who had been able to write plays with a skill equivalent to his, but we would also think less of the plays themselves because, taken all together, they had been the joint creations of five men instead of one.

It is relatively easy for critics to place a single man on a pinnacle and make a god out of him — when they see how much it strengthens their authority to do so and

they consequently all work in unison to achieve it. But to place five men together there, figuratively pushing and jostling each other about through the arguments of their respective partisans,* is a much more difficult task, and can hardly be accomplished in a manner conducive to the creation about them of the desired atmosphere of divinity.

The undertaking of this "mental experiment" therefore helps us to see, I think, how unhealthy and deluding these hero-obsessions really are and what hurt critics do to us by generating them.

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It is considerations such as these which begin to disturb the mind of any worth-while critic as soon as he rises above the barest rudiments of his profession, and inspects the machinery of what he is doing. Mere routine and impressionistic reports of his likes and dislikes, no matter how conscientiously and painstakingly he has developed his culture, soon begin to acquire an extreme inadequacy and impertinence — somewhat as if he should forecast the weather by his lumbago. And at exactly the moment he attempts to go beyond this point and say something revealing, significant and above all, honest, it becomes evident that criticism's language, its entire tradition, and angle of approach must be so radically altered as to constitute practically a starting all over again. The vast bulk of our so-called "classics of criticism" would have to be discarded — or at least shelved — not because there was a lack in them of acute and subtle analysis, but because that analysis was so

*Such as the highly unorthodox comment of Henri Peyre in *Writers and their Critics* that "it is a breach of manners, among professors of English, to hint that Ford, in *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, Tourneur in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, Middleton in *The Changeling* are the equals (to say the least) of Shakespeare in at least one third of his plays."

permeated with obsolete convictions — so relentlessly directed towards the exposition of a theory which was not only false but, worse still, irrelevant, that the relish of the performance was completely extinguished by the reek of the enveloping atmosphere.

And now to look again at the consequences of accepting what I allege to be a more realistic view of aesthetics. If by accepting it we invalidate our entire critical tradition, can that be insignificant? Even to the “ordinary man” preoccupied with his everyday affairs and wrongly perceiving art as a luxury for the dilettante such is by no means the case. And to the “cultured man” who is sincerely interested in art — who desires to read criticism without feeling that he is consorting with hypocrites, imbeciles or snobs — but rather with honest investigators who recognize both the resources and the limits of their profession — to such a man it will be as a license to draw breath again.

* * * *

However, the mere vanquishing of critics (if it can be accomplished) the mere annihilation of the vampire doctrines which have been sapping our vitality under their administration for a seeming eternity — though a necessary preliminary — is only a minor consequence compared to the greater one which obviously follows — namely the organizing and developing of a *new* criticism — a criticism which will be founded not on a pretended *complete order* but on a semi-order (or semi-chaos), created simply through the greater likelihood of one thing happening than another. It will be a criticism of a decidedly less glamor than the old — groping, experimental, extremely human, even frustrated — and yet, for that very reason, more solid and dependable. It will have no

skeletons in its closet, no insincerities on its conscience, no lip-homages to corrupt its adherents.

However, I do not propose to indulge here in any elaborate exposition either of its superiorities or its deficiencies. These will transpire from page to page.

First we must look to the method which the critic must employ in the application of this aesthetics to his profession. Manifestly it is not an easy method. If it were, the critic would have neither use nor respect for it. His capacities will be tested to their fullest extent in its conduct; but it is not a method of verbosity, of confusion nor of pedantry. It is as pertinent to the naivetes of music, painting and literature as to their sophistications. At its higher levels it will make as great demands on the reader's comprehension as on the critic's creative power, but that comprehension is eventually achievable. The culmination is in a clarity rather than in a fog.

The critic can, of course, specialize, if he desires to do so, and I am referring now not to a specializing of subject matter, but to a specializing of his treatment of that subject matter. As I have already said there are two realms of criticism — in some degree separate from one another — the realm of complexity-appraisal and the realm of beauty-appraisal. The former is especially suitable for the scholarly, careful man, who likes things to be well established and prefers not to take risks. In that domain his appraisals are both surer and more stable. There is greater scope for reasoning and argument; and his opinion though called in question can rarely be positively confuted. There is, however, a sense of non-completion — perhaps even of shirking and faint-heartedness — in a continued abiding within those bounds. The relation of art directly to man is not fully expressed. For the critic of resolution who wishes to feel that he is not

doing a desk-job behind the lines but actually participating in the battle at the front the call to enter also the field of beauty-appraisal will be almost irresistible. But if he does take this step he must accept the consequences. He must abandon his pose of perfectionism and autocracy. He must adopt the philosophy of the gambler, face the gambler's ups and downs, his willingness to ride the percentages, to accept manfully the punishment for a wrong guess in the hope of reestablishing himself by a good one. And above all, his estimation of beauty must be strictly *in relation to the group of persons whose reactions he is concerned with*. The impact of an art work on his own fatigue pattern, if mentioned at all, is mentioned only as an incidentality, after the manner that a physician, when prescribing for his patient's malady, might chance to speak of his recently having suffered from a similar ailment himself.

Perhaps the first problem to which he must give his attention is the general composition of that group of persons in relation to whom his appraisals are being made. And it is at this point that he undertakes the stipulation upon which his estimate of beauty probabilities must rest. This stipulation may range from what I term the *basic or universal stipulation*, to all degrees of narrow and specific stipulation. If his appraisal is directed to everybody in the world, young or old, black, white or yellow, civilized, semi-civilized or barbaric, he is depending on the *basic stipulation*, he is making his guess, that is, in relation to "typical man" who is assumed to represent, within himself, the world fatigue pattern, a blending into one summation of all the "natural" probabilities that at the moment prevail or will prevail in the future. Needless to say, any critic who attempts such a task is extremely daring if not foolhardy. To venture, against

such odds, a beauty assessment that could be imagined as having better than an even chance of coming out right, is an act which only a man with pretensions to divinity should attempt. I can conceive of some art works — such as a magic carpet or the elixir of life — which might be considered as eternally having a high beauty-probability, but they possess it simply from their lack of existence. In the domain of commercial innovation I can perceive certain items which, for a limited period, would possess a high beauty probability. At this particular moment, for instance, television if it could somehow be made available to all men on earth, might very possibly cause a considerable upward surge in humanity's average happiness which would endure for say three, six or ten weeks, until the fatigue pattern had adjusted itself to the innovation. But such cases are clearly exceptional.

And strictly in the field of fine arts, I am able to imagine, no exemplar — no book, musical composition, statuary, nor painting — no matter how amazing the genius of its author — which even for today, and without consideration of tomorrow, could reasonably be predicted as having substantially more than a fifty per cent beauty probability. There is not sufficient *fine art conformity* to make possible a better accomplishment than this.

It is clear, therefore, that the "basic stipulation" is not very practical in the day to day conduct of criticism. The field must somehow be narrowed; and fortunately it is not difficult to do so. In fact, this narrowing is automatically accomplished for us by countless instrumentalities of life. A steady bettering of the chances of making correct guesses occurs as we point our criticism first to the inhabitants of the United States, then to those who live in Boston or Chicago or New York, then to college graduates, then to the subscribers to a specific periodical of

small and exclusive circulation, then to the members of a neighborhood club and finally to the small group of friends in our own circle. Furthermore, what I have called "artificial" stipulations may be used as influences in the same direction. I may make the prediction "you will like this novel *if you like stories of adventure*"; or the prediction "you will like this opera *if you direct your attention to the orchestra instead of to the singing, or if the leading tenor part is sung by so and so*"; or the prediction "you will like the extremer manifestations of modern painting *if you are a radically-minded person sympathetic to breaches of convention*"; or the prediction, "you will like brief extracts of *Don Quixote, Orlando Furioso, the Heptameron, Princesse de Cleves, Humphrey Clinker, the Castle of Otranto, and Jerusalem Delivered if you regard them as the beginning parts of the larger art work, being a cultured man in the traditional style*"; and in making stipulations of this kind I am again increasing my likelihood of being correct and reducing my percentage of error.

Stipulations, which might be needed — beside the general stipulation of being a broadly cultured man in the Western European sense — for the enjoyment of certain special art works might easily include the following:—

1. For Shakespeare's plays: that you anticipate satisfactions from being able to recognize allusions to his works or to quote him yourself; that you are familiar enough with Elizabethan archaisms of speech to translate them into modern English instantaneously and without effort; that you are appreciative of the fine points of versification; that words such as noble, exalted, monumental are favorites in your critical vocabulary; that low comedy in the sixteenth century style does not too rapidly tire you.

2. For Winged Victory and the Mona Lisa: that you have not been alienated by the exaggerated tributes to their preeminance which so many critics have enunciated.

3. For Manet's Olympia and Dejeuner Sur L'Herbe: that it intrigues you to consider what things have shocked earlier generations.

4. For Schoenberg's Verklaerte Nacht: that it makes no difference what series of tones or system of patterning is applied to music.

5. For the paintings of Douanier Rousseau, Bombois and other primitives: that you are able to perceive technically unskilled representation as a *variant* and not a *fault*.

And so on; stipulations (and the probabilities they generate) are not only the foundation of criticism, but they are its framework, its buttresses, its powers, spires and ornaments. A critic of the new criticism — if he is to prove his qualifications — must learn to manipulate them with the craft and virtuosity that the painter does his colors, or the composer does pitch, timbre and tempo. Like all art media, they can be employed in a manner either to delight or to distress, either to inspirit or to mortify. An inept and clumsy handling of them can be as obnoxious as the evils they are intended to cure.

A critic who, on each occasion that he recommended a current play added the proviso, "assuming that you have not already seen it", would simply be annoying his readers with a stipulation which would usually be taken for granted; or if he appraised a novel as "boring if you had at least one year at high school" his lack of tact (unless the comment were meant jocularly) might alienate a good proportion of them. On the other hand, the critic must never allow the factors here involved — of

degree of reiteration and degree of education — wholly to disappear from the scene. He must keep them always somewhere in the picture — even if unobtrusively — ready for transference to the foreground when occasion calls. If his readers resent their being expressed so crudely as in the above cases, he must find appropriate opportunity for a more subtle applying of them. If he fails to do so; if he takes too much for granted, if he allows his appraisals gradually to become unduly dogmatic his readers will get out of hand and he will find himself in the embarrassing predicament of Mr. Nathan, compelled — because he neglected to interpolate a few gentle reminders from time to time — to apologize for no longer getting fun out of excessively-perceived art works as if some other outcome than this were even remotely conceivable.

However, this emphasis on the need for tact in the making of stipulations does not mean that they must be faint-heartedly used. Quite the contrary. A bold — even an extravagant — featuring of them frequently brings out interesting points.

If I make it a condition of my appraising of Painting X as "beautiful", that all paintings in the world be destroyed, that for a period of ten years thereafter no artist shall be allowed to produce other paintings to take their place and that painting X be a representation of an unusual and striking landscape resembling none that was elsewhere visible in the world — if I have to insist upon such conditions to endow Painting X with beauty, I may be taking criticism rather far afield, but I have at least brought out the important point that Painting X — or any other painting one might care to name, including the daub produced by a novice in his first day at art school — could be rendered beautiful if I desired to adopt a series of sufficiently desperate expedients.

If I assert that to the curator of the Dresden Art Museum the painting in New York's Metropolitan Museum would probably be more beautiful (or enjoyable) than those of his own institution assuming (1) that his contemplation of the pictures in his museum had been both frequent and protracted and (2) that the period of time between his departure from Dresden and his arrival in New York had not been long enough greatly to reduce his tiredness of those pictures — if I assert this fact, and if I also assert that a visit of the Metropolitan Museum's curator to the Dresden Museum would produce a corresponding result, I am again giving rather free rein to my imagination, but I am also bringing out how widely different might be the beauty appraisals which, under special circumstances, would be rendered of exactly the same pictures by men of presumably equal culture.

Or again, if I assert that in order that the pictures in the two museums should be perceived by their curators as of approximately equal beauty it would be necessary that they spend five months of every year at one museum and seven months at the other the implausibility of such a thing happening does not prevent it from demonstrating that under those circumstances the relative complexity or resistance to reiteration or wearing quality of the pictures in the two museums would be approximately in the ratio of seven to five. And it would illustrate, in addition, what the difference is between the beauty of an art work and its complexity or resistance to reiteration; and incidentally remind us again that the pretentious adjurations about the enduring beauty of this or that masterpiece of art to which we are so frequently being exposed are being made by men at approximately the same level of intellectual development as scientists would

be if they failed to realize the difference between humidity and evaporation.

Stipulations of this same kind — and not necessarily less radical — can form the basis for any number of extremely interesting critical comments not only in imaginary situations such as these just cited but in the everyday conduct of the critic's business. Not only that, but the proper and honest use of them enables the critic to draw the public towards an intelligent viewing of art and away from that undue rigidity and formalization of it which eventually boomerangs on both the critic and his readers.

For instance let us imagine that an all-Beethoven symphony concert is to be given at Carnegie Hall. The audience will very naturally consist ninety-percent of lovers of "classical" music, men and women who have traversed the complexity cycles of the various compositions to be rendered, at least to the general neighborhood of the point of highest complexity and not too far beyond it into the leaving behind period, with the result that their resistance to the reiteration of that music is at or close to the maximum. Their motive for going to the concert is merely that by a sufficient abstention they have built up enough untiredness of Beethoven's music to anticipate pleasure from a reperception of it; and little more than an orthodox and reasonably competent execution of it is necessary to furnish that pleasure.

Contrast this with the attitude of the professional critic. As I have already said, he is a warped and unsymmetrical man, made so, inevitably, by listening to a great deal more music than his own fatigue-pattern would call for. His best vacation would be two weeks of a complete silence. The prospect of attending a concert of supposedly immortal compositions by Beethoven has very

little if any appeal to him outside of his desire to keep his job. He has heard them all a hundred times — and is sick to death of them *so far as a mere proficient interpretation is concerned*.^{*} His only chance to escape boredom lies in factors completely external to Beethoven — lies in permutations and variations contributed by the conductor or performer. To write another review from the level of the amateur audience leaves him no scope for operation whatever — leaves him nothing to say except a rehash of what he has already many times said. And it is at this point that he must exercise the greatest care. If he wants to write his review at levels which are *interesting to him* and discuss orchestral nuances, tempo subtleties, preponderances of strings, wood-wind, brass or percussion sections and other factors probably over the heads of his readers, he must avoid pedantic and personal merit-verdicts about them. The emphasizing or moderating of a crescendo or accent, the abbreviating or prolonging of rests must never be spoken of as “beautiful” or “unbeautiful” (regardless of the critic’s individual feeling of them), but must be spoken of as variants, as possible progressions towards complexity. By learning to see them the concert-goer at least gains opportunities for future enjoyment, and in the meantime the composition in which these variants are perceived gains a greater resistance to reiteration. In other words, the critic *takes on interest* in these opportunities, — he turns our attention towards them, but he *keeps the situation liquid*. He achieves this liquidity, of course, simply by conditional rather than positive statements. That protects him and protects us. It protects him in his own professional pride and integrity. It protects us because it does not set us off in a fanatic and subservient pursuing of “ideal beauties”

^{*}Regardless of any indignant denials of the fact he might make.

which when attained soon reveal themselves as possessing only an evanescent charm.

Suppose, for illustration, that there is a certain critic who is a liberal in regard to the degree of freedom with which a conductor can interpret the original composer's renditional instructions. Suppose he is sympathetic to certain alleged "heresies" which the conductor has ventured to interpolate — sympathetic even to outright alterations in the prescribed tempos, accentuations and volumes — and perceives them not as "sacrileges" but as entirely legitimate devices for increasing the degree of repetition the composition can support before inducing excessive tiredness. Under these suppositions the only strong stand which the critic can take — if he is a supporter of the new criticism — is in support of the conductor's right to contribute these variations when he wishes to do so, of another conductor's right to contribute other variations when he wishes to do so and of a third conductor's right to adhere to the original score when he wishes to do so. He joins no partisan clique, supporting this or the other style of rendition of this or any other composition, hating those who differ from him or striving to demonstrate how "inartistic" they are. He recognizes the fact that two persons may have the same degree of appreciation of an art work, may see it as composed of exactly the same group of associations, and yet react to it with widely differing degrees of pleasure (or pain) simply through the inequality of their untiredness of it and its associations. In relation to persons who chance to share his own pattern, the variations which happen to suit *him* manifestly will suit *them* — *at the moment*. If overdone, if persisted in too long, if looked on — in the custom of White-Feather Aesthetics — as *permanently better*, they soon cease to be desirable and

something else becomes desirable. He might even concede that they would be *less often* desirable than the original score — in fact that any conceivable assortment of variation would be less often desirable than the original score — and yet this would not reduce their aesthetic value.

The outcry against “tampering” with an art work’s original format in music (or in any art) which is now so vehement among orthodoxly-minded critics is a necessary consequence, of course, of their ignoring of Fatigue as a factor in art — of their rigidly standing against it as though it didn’t exist, instead of bending and adjusting themselves to it — with the natural result that they collapse all the sooner to its force. It illustrates how, in a fallaciously organized aesthetics, one “principle” clashes against another. For clearly the constant and unchanging repetition of a composition in as close as possible an approximation to the composer’s original conception must mitigate against its achieving that other supposedly important objective — artistic endurance.

Probably it is unnecessary to give instances (from the almost unlimited number available) of how vehemently current critical opinion takes exactly the opposite stand than I have expressed. I should like to quote two passages, however, both from the same book,* because between them — though unconsciously, unwillingly and backhandedly — they lend a certain support to my contentions.

“Interpretation does not mean”, says the author, “putting into music retards or accelerations or dynamics not called for by the music, but imposed by the interpreter to heighten the emotional effect. Unfortunately too many

**The Story of Arturo Toscanini* by David Ewen.

conductors are guilty of such indiscretions . . . The greatest performance is that which brings to life precisely what the composer put down on paper, no less and no more."

This, of course, is exactly the orthodox view — exactly the fundamental belief on which White-Feather Aesthetics supports itself in *all* the arts. Nothing must be changed; even if its purpose is apparently the beneficial one to "heighten the emotional effect".

And now consider the second quotation taken from another page of the same work.

"Only too often, unfortunately, conductors continue performing musical works of which they have long since grown tired, and the inevitable result is lackadaisical and stagnant performances."

Regarded together, it seems that these allegations — though not meant to do so — sustain very decidedly the contention that I have advanced — namely that art works differ basically only in the speeds at which they tire those who perceive them, and that it is the function of the artist (including the conductor of musical compositions) to do what is possible to delay that tiring — by means of variants — rather than to hasten it by demanding a continuous exact reiteration of what is supposedly a perfection.

I do not think there is any obligation upon me to go any more deeply than this into the application of probabilities and stipulations to criticism. There are an infinite number of them, they can be practically referred to any situation, simple or abstruse, and, when correctly used, they immensely extend the scope of criticism without disestablishing those previously valuable sections of it (such as analysis and description) which were independent of doctrinal fallacies.

An exponent of the new criticism must, above all, disinfatuate himself with his own sensitiveness. The fact that he "loves beauty" does not qualify him as an expert. Everybody loves beauty. It's an automatic response. When you identify beauty with pleasure, that is obvious. What these rather priggish persons — dazed by their own "susceptibility" — really mean is that they love pleasures which most other persons have not learned to perceive as pleasures — that is, pleasures which are out of the common run or more difficult than the ordinary to appreciate. It is true that men with this ability may be useful in pointing the way for the rest of us to acquire that ability. But this does not qualify them for anything beyond the service which that one talent enables them to render. There are an infinite number of complexity patterns just as there are an infinite number of fatigue patterns. Certain individuals make especially rapid advance along particular lines of appreciation, sometimes from native capacity in that direction, sometimes from merely turning left at a crossroads instead of right, often from plain industry. This may warrant a certain modest self-satisfaction, but no more. In fact it is only in the field of fine arts that the connoisseur puts on airs of transcendence and even of divinity for his acquirements. Distinguished astronomers, chemists and mathematicians are quite capable of associating calmly with a person who happens to be ill-informed on their subject. They will even enlighten him on its intricacies without any insinuations that he is a simpleton or a boor; and will freely concede that in his line — whatever it may be — his capacities may be as important as theirs. Not so the aesthete! The cold and contemptuous look which he gives to "the philistine" who chances not to react to the exemplar of beauty he favors can be matched

only by that which he in turn receives from the super-aesthete who considers himself to have gone beyond that beauty.

The perceptions of "fine-art beauties" are no more difficult — nor even essential — than any others. Thousands of supposedly hard-headed business men are entirely capable of learning to perceive them if given the time and opportunity to do so; and the proficiency which many of them would demonstrate might be a severe shock to the "experts" who consider themselves exclusively qualified. Plenty of commercial affairs — when well accomplished — have a flavor decidedly akin to art creation.

The critic of the new criticism, therefore, must look outside of himself much more frequently than within. He may observe his own likes and dislikes, but with considerable reservation and even suspicion. That he has felt an art work to be beautiful is *by itself* of negligible importance. One day an art work is beautiful; another day it isn't. Its beauty depends entirely on his fatigue pattern and has value to mankind only when it can be applied to the fatigue pattern of a large enough group of other persons to be worth considering. Simply to report his reaction blindly, without a preliminary study to determine whether it is the result of accidental surfeit or abstinence, is to shirk his responsibility and to leave the interpretation of the event to those he is expected to relieve of this task.

His attitude must be more that of the hygienist than that of the so-called beauty-lover or of the old-fashioned partisan critic.

The analyzing of an artistic flavor becomes really important only through the demonstration of what it does or can do to man. It must either help to adjust his

present nerve-unbalance or offer potentialities for doing so in the future. Consequently the ivory-tower critic, who immerses himself in his materiel — books, paintings, music and so on — is a *half-critic*. He is as the chemist who should announce the molecular formula for arsenic without stating that it was a poison or for dynamite without stating that it was an explosive. The *complete* critic must be an analyzer of *men* as well as of *art works*. He must be out and about, appraising men's nervous dis-symmetries from day to day, noting the mal-distributions they are exposed to, their trends away from or towards the pattern of equal beauty. Without the combining of both those processes into one he is as inoperative as a hammer blow in vacuum or a lever without a fulcrum.

As to what would happen to the word *beauty* under such circumstances it is not easy to say. Although I have defined it as pleasurability I imagine it could never be accepted as exactly synonymous to that term if we expect it to remain in our vocabulary. It could never be an exact thing but always a fluid thing. Perhaps I can best define it as corresponding to the naivest employment of it by an ordinary person — as contrasted to the employment of it by a critic. If Mr. A says to Mr. B that Venice is the most beautiful city in the world he means that he enjoyed it very much when he visited it and that he *thinks* Mr. B will do likewise. He does not mean that he would like to live there forever. In fact it is only when critics begin to confuse him with technicalities that he falls into the error of going into details on the subject and becoming involved with problems of appreciation and eternal endurance. For colloquial needs this elementary meaning of beauty should be enough. As soon as man goes *beyond* that point into serious

criticism and aesthetics it would seem to me that the word should rarely if ever be employed.

However, the critic's merely changing himself from the dilettante to the practical man, though essential, is not enough. There is another reformation to be undertaken. He must also cease to be the snob and become the democrat. The concentrating of his energy on the *aristocracy* of art — on the more complex exemplars of its various branches — must be done away with.

To justify himself in neglecting popular art by alleging that the criticism of it is too easy to be worthy of his talents is to revert again to his "halfness". It may be easy to classify popular art *introspectively*; but to steer it towards those men whose fatigue pattern it will rest and away from those whom it will merely exacerbate is *not* easy. And equally incorrect is the excuse that man *outgrows* popular (or uncomplex) art, naturally and inevitably, by the mere process of himself becoming more complex. For, first, man never *does* outgrow popular art. Popular art by virtue of its simplicity is both a necessary foil *for* the complex and a necessary rest *from* it. This truth has unfortunately been largely kept out of sight by the pious and hypocritical dicta of intellectual toadies who like to prove their "good taste", by an extravagant scorn for simple things. The "real" musician detests jazz and the day's song hit, so they tell us; the poet abhors the newspaper verse; the true dramatist despises the "merely entertaining" play; the genuine artist cannot even direct his eyes towards the sentimental or trivial "pretty picture". It may be that cultured persons tend to be more often tired than untired of such art forms, but that is merely due to the excess of them to which they are naturally subjected through the influence of majority rule. Deprive them of their due

quota (small though it may be) and their dependence on it will soon be manifest.

Second, no man can become highly complex in *all* of art's infinite directions. He must always be at least in part un-cultured. If he attempts to make a balanced progress along many paths, he can make only slight progress along those paths, and there will still be numerous ramifications untouched; and if he wishes to make considerable progress along a *few*, he must scant the rest. The critic must acknowledge this fact. He must accept men in their inadequacies and distortions; and deliver his appraisals as willingly and conformably for the uneducated as for the educated.

If a certain man happens to be well grounded in music, say, but less so in literature and painting is he to be treated as an outcast if he chances to step into those latter fields? Shall the critics there regard him with contempt and decline to aid his immature efforts? Shall they ignore the fact that if there were more time available he could quite easily correct the situation by himself, though less rapidly than if they assisted him; and that his experience with music has well acquainted him with the general method by which it may be done. Is he to be denied his preliminary enjoyment of *Prisoner of Zenda*, of the poems of Edgar Guest, of the stories of the *Saturday Evening Post*, of the paintings of Boecklin or Burne-Jones because they are "sentimental" or "melodramatic" or "trivial" or because they are "not really art at all"? Is he to be strictly confined to the enjoyments advocated by worn-out and satiated aesthetic roués who originally came along the same road as himself but by now, like the Marquis de Sade in erotics, derive their excitation mainly from what to the amateur, seem eccentricities — mainly from the allusive sardonicisms of

T. S. Eliot, the distortions of Chagall, the morbidities of Dali and Kafka, the introspective self-dissections of Stendhal or the world-wearinesses of Proust and Gauguin?

Clearly any such starched and baronial ignoring of men who chance to wander from their own domain into that where the critic is at home seems not only ridiculous but might lead to awkward reprisals if the conditions were reversed. Admittedly the raw beginner's questings may be trying — his interrogations as inept as those of the little old lady on her first visit to the machine shop. Admittedly his callow unperception of seemingly obvious effects and his infatuations for the flashy will annoy. I know nothing that can more exasperate the critic than the stony indifference of an audience to the subtleties he so gratifyingly perceives unless it is the burst of laughter with which they greet an effect which to him is so banal and wearying that he can barely endure a moment of its contemplation. These discommodities, however, would seem to be merely those which naturally appertain to the profession; and it must be remembered, also, that they have undoubtedly been aggravated by criticism's own misteachings. The calm arrogance with which a greenhorn announces his verdicts can be as obnoxious as in the case of the critic, but it must be acknowledged that the critic set him the example.

There are no "musts" nor "oughts" in beauty appraisals. Critics may not declare that a person *should* like Milton's *Paradise Lost*, for instance. They may not even say that he *will* like it as soon as he has sufficiently cultivated his taste. For all they know he may have acquired that sufficient cultivation five years ago and have since been exposed to such a reiteration of *Paradise Lost* that another perusal of it would be highly disagreeable.

This might even have happened without his ever having read *Paradise Lost*, and only by having been subjected to high degree likenesses to it. And if they attempt to deny that it could ever conceivably be disagreeable to him they are, in effect, declaring that it would be impossible for him ever to catch up with Milton's capacities, that Milton reached in the seventeenth century an outer boundary of art which man will never be able to go beyond even if man continues to exist on earth for a million centuries, that Milton is a god, not a man, and will always remain a god in relation to the rest of mankind; in short they are asking us to believe something which not only can never be substantiated by proof but has every appearance of being an untruth.

And it must also be remembered that the probabilities of man's enjoying an art work are greatest *not* when it is *fully* appreciated (or understood) but when it is *half-way* appreciated, — that is, when it is at the *top* of its complexity cycle in relation to him and therefore loses its beauty most slowly. As soon as he *fully appreciates* it, as Turkey in the Straw, or King Solomon's Mines are now fully appreciated by most of us, the likelihood of enjoyment drops sharply, because the resistance to re-iteration is down to the minimum.

It is failure to bear these facts in mind that destroys the force of a comment I find approvingly captioned in Reader's Digest as "The Searching Question", as follows:—

At Columbia College they still remember the time the late Professor Raymond Weaver gave his first class in English literature their first quiz. A whistle of joy went up from the group, which had been trying to make things hard for the new instructor, when Weaver

wrote on the blackboard, "Which of the books read so far has interested you least?"

But then Weaver wrote the second and last question: "To what defect in yourself do you attribute this lack of interest?"*

Now this incident, I am forced to state, is not nearly so "searching" as it may seem. If the first question had read "which of the books read so far has interested you the *most*?" and the second question had read "to what defect in yourself do you attribute this *excessive interest*?" the test would actually have been a more exacting one; because obviously man has made his furthest intellectual progress when he has completely mastered a book and its interest to him has consequently declined almost to nothing; not the other way around.

If you have any doubts in your mind about this, you may satisfy yourself of its truth, I believe, by imagining (if you can) that the books Professor Weaver had assigned for his class to read were not "mature" works, such as Aeneid, or Oedipus Rex, or Candide, or Scarlet Letter, or Anna Karenina, as they presumably might have been, but instead were more elementary works such as Lorna Doone, Beloved Vagabond, Brushwood Boy, David Harum and Black Beauty. Can you not visualize the sarcasms with which almost *any* present-day professor of literature (not necessarily Professor Weaver) would have greeted his students' youthful enthusiasms for these latter works — which he himself (in his greater wisdom) had gone so far beyond and now perceived to be *narrow and commonplace*! But why are the books which happen to appertain to a greater wisdom differentiated from those which appertain to a lesser wisdom except in that one attribute of their degree of wisdom. Is there a definite limit of wisdom, to which the professor

*Originally cited by Joseph Wood Krutch in *The Nation*.

has almost attained, or is there an infinity of it towards which he has barely made a start? If the latter, then why has the professor failed to go far enough beyond the particular books he recommends so that they *also* will seem to him *narrow and commonplace*. What has delayed him?

What chicken-hearts and milk-sops these educators (backed by critics, of course) are making of us. They are presenting art works to us as end-points leading nowhere. Learn to appreciate Masterpiece A and Masterpiece B and Masterpiece C, they say, and then give up. Spend the rest of your life in admiration of them. Don't dare step beyond them, as you have beyond all others, because there is no beyond, only an impenetrable wall. We know, because we experts are there and can see. The best you can possibly do is come up even. How well the term White-Feather Aesthetic seems here to fit!

That is the language neither of progress nor of men; but of defeat and of cowards. Instead of it we must say to ourselves: Learn to appreciate Masterpieces A, B and C, yes; but do not stop there, nor think for a moment that there are any resting places in the climb to complexity. Learn to appreciate them — and then to *tire* of them — and as quickly as possible; in order that we may go on to what comes next. And if artists have not yet created beyond that point, then demand that they do. When there has been a sufficient crowding at these points either of art works or of men, this sense of an impasse will soon disappear.

Actually artists *have* created beyond these masterpieces. It is only that we are so intimidated by the Frankenstein tradition of immortalism which we have ourselves built, that we are afraid to say so. Man's mind and senses necessarily must advance as the world advances.

He must think, see and hear more complexly in order that he can surround and take in a more complex world, a world into which relativity, psycho-analysis, nuclear fission and a hundred other new complexities have introduced concepts of a depth and convolution which would have utterly stumped and bewildered men of the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries. An adult of those eras would find it completely impossible to understand such intricacies, even if he dared try — which is doubtful. And even an infant, starting out fresh — although we cannot be sure to what degree the brain is conditioned by heredity — might find his mentality entirely unequal to the task. Is it conceivable that these intellectual progressions should not be reflected into the fine arts, and that man's mind would not have been so complexified by them that the ideas, characterizations and figures of speech of literature; the motifs, rhythms and thematic developments of music; the subjects, designs and color-combinations of painting, as expressed by these men of an earlier age, would eventually acquire so obtrusive a primitivism — like the beat of a tom-tom — as to be enjoyable only for the barest moment as curiosities?

In this connection allow me to quote a review* of a recent anthology of poetry, as follows:—

“the sound taste of the editors of this volume is shown not only in the poems which they have chosen but in the poems which they have dared to reject. Poe's *Raven* is not here: presumably he is vacationing with Shelley's *Skylark*, missing too. *Thanatopsis* is refreshingly absent.”

Now although there is a slightly cocky avant-gardism in this evaluation, I regard as highly significant the fact

*by Dudley Fitts in the New York Times Book Review for July 1, 1951.

that a good many people would not be unduly shocked by it, despite their having been brought up in a contrary tradition. It indicates that there *is* movement in art, even if of glacier-like slowness and I am thereby encouraged to envision the day when the three "masterpieces" thus rather brusquely dismissed as having been "outgrown" will be not those here listed, but instead will be, say, Shakespeare's Hamlet, Milton's Paradise Lost and Goethe's Faust — or other works of that reputation. As to exactly how soon some enterprising critic will venture the gesture I cannot say, but it will come very shortly, I think.

And if some superhuman being, capable of looking ahead far enough to know the actual outcome, should make me a proposition that my life would be extended a hundred years or ended abruptly today, according to whether my prognostication was correct or incorrect I would take him up on it without a moment's hesitation.

Furthermore I will risk another prophesy — that there will never more be any artists whose fames will be inflated to anywhere near the height to which have been those of the above-mentioned geniuses whom we still choose to regard as semi-divinities. That era has passed irrevocably. Men are too exposed to human scrutiny nowadays for any of them to become enveloped in the haze of myth and fable appropriate to that exalting of them. Artistically the twilight of the Gods appears to have set in. The "immortality of genius" will soon seem as ridiculous as the once strongly-held notion of the divinity of kings, which is now being exploded in the last of its strongholds — Japan. And along with it there will also disappear the concomitant notion that there is any *fixed* relation of betterness between one art work and another, or between one artist and another.

This expresses the consequences which I perceive as eventuating from a criticism based on probabilities and recognizant of fatigue.

Can it be considered that a criticism such as this is too intricate for practical application? In a sense that is true. But the same can be said of any branch of human knowledge, The furthest reaches of astronomy, of mathematics; of music, painting and poetry are over the heads of the great majority. But a realization of those furthest reaches, even if only partial, nevertheless permeates the lower levels. It may not be wholly expressed but it is *read between the lines* of everything which is honestly and sincerely written or said on the subject.

No doubt it is easier to compose music by the ancient laws of harmony, before Monteverdi, than in the relative freedom of today. No doubt it is easier to write novels as if all noble deeds were done out of nobility, and never out of vanity, hate or revenge; as if all captains who went down with their ships did so out of pure heroism and never from fear to face the consequences of not doing so; but as we become adult we are forced to see that there are mixed and extremely complex motives in everything that man does and that to ignore these motives because they are difficult to analyze and even more difficult to recount is to shirk our responsibilities. Critics must play their part in this necessary progression towards maturity and find some way to escape from their archaic fallacies. They must learn to express themselves in the language of today rather than in that of the dark ages.

Furthermore we must bear in mind that the difficulty which "ordinary men" might find in understanding such a criticism is a difficulty which the critics themselves have manufactured by their own wrong teachings. Naturally after centuries of inculcating mankind with a romantic

falsity, the critics must expect to encounter considerable suspicion, resentment and miscomprehension when they come forward with a directly opposite theory even if it is honest and logical.

There is also another important point to be remembered in connection with this new criticism — namely that it does not split art into mutually exclusive subdivisions. Under White-Feather Aesthetics, critics are continually reminding us of the impossibility of comparing a novel with a sonata, a ballet with a cathedral, or a painting with a play. Naturally not, when false standards prevail. But when art's purpose of prolonging life is recognized, when the factors under consideration are art's complexity, resistance to reiteration and applicability to current fatigue patterns then this artificial separation between categories is done away with — as it should be. There is nothing to prevent us from placing Gericault side by side with Emerson, Gounod with Jane Austen, Isadora Duncan with Maeterlinck, Cabanel with Jules Verne, Bach with Zane Grey, Sappho with George Gershwin, Douglas Fairbanks with Emile Zola and drawing interesting and valuable conclusions therefrom, no matter how seemingly incongruous the association. Art works are linked together by *what they do to men*. Is there any other connection they conceivably could have?

Chapter X

CONSEQUENCES TO THE CREATIVE ARTIST

SO far as the consequences of Factual Aesthetics to the *creative artist* are separate from its consequences to *Criticism* and to *Man in general* (which are the subjects of the previous and the following chapter) they may be summed up, I think, as those which would accrue to him if he could be induced to believe that *there is no one best way to do anything*. My reason for considering this important is that artists seem so universally and frantically to be conducting their affairs under exactly the opposite belief. They are forever searching for some artistic panacea — forever conjuring up from the depths of their beings some procedure or formula by which — if they could only make it work — everything would be set right. I am striving for greater intensity or greater solidity or greater truth or greater coherence in my work, they often say; with the implication that success in this endeavor would enable them to produce masterpieces practically without end. Or to quote a few actual samples from a magazine article which happens at the moment to be before me*, they are “trying to bring about a purer, closer understanding between form and space, which are equivalents” or “to get at the inner reality by careful observation of the outer reality” or to express

**Six Abstractionists Defend Their Art*, by Aline B. Loucheim in the New York Times Magazine of January 21, 1951.

their search "for a direct mystical experience . . . because there is a feeling of an abyss, a void between one's self and everything outside and an impulse to bridge it", and so on. Now credences such as these (and others of their kind) would be legitimate enough if they were proposed merely as temporary expedients for the relieving of some fatigue which the artist perceived either in himself or in the group of persons to whom his art work was directed. Usually, however, they seem advocated as being something much more momentous — as actually being permanent recipes for the achievement of beauty. And it is in the hardening of these mere notions into obsessions and fanaticisms that the damage is done. When an artist turns himself into what is called a "perfectionist" — that is, when he persuades himself that there is one best way to do a thing and that he will find it and accomplish it even if it kills him, he is not working himself into a frame of mind which will produce great art — as the romanticist tries to tell us — but slowing his own progress, tampering with his own talent. And to appreciate the truth of this fact it is not necessary for him to conduct an elaborate investigation but merely to draw the obvious deductions from incidents which are of daily occurrence in his profession.

For instance in the art of painting there is a very revealing experiment which an artist can undertake with one of his own pictures. He will find that *any change whatever* in the method of its presentation to him will increase his enjoyment of it. Move it into a position where it receives greater illumination or less illumination, *either one*, and it will seem more pleasing. After the lapse of sufficient time, replace it where it was, and again there will be an upward surge of attraction. Change the

frame and once more the effect will be beneficial, regardless of the frame's shape, color or size. And so on.

Now these improvements, of course, are due to nothing more than a shifting of the picture's emotional impact from the particular group of nerves which have previously been carrying the load to a slightly different (and presumably fresher) group. As to the relative duration of these improvements, I make no statement; that is another matter. I simply report their existence and that when we concede their existence we must also concede that no matter how we paint a picture — no matter how perseveringly we have struggled to endow it with certain qualities — some other way of painting it would have been better under different conditions.

Or to take a case from the writing art, authors are continually discarding, on a later day, passages about which they were full of enthusiasm at the moment they originally composed them. But instead of adopting the natural explanation of such an event, they manufacture various supposedly more profound explanations, such as that the passages were "too sentimental" or "too rhetorical" or "too clever", in order to bolster their own belief that what they did the first time was incorrect and what they did the second time was correct. In fact a widely circulated bit of advice to authors is *immediately to draw a blue pencil through anything they have particularly liked*. This is plain nonsense. What actually happened to these discarded passages was perfectly natural. They lost their attraction to those who wrote them simply because their authors subsequently *abused* their own fatigue patterns by frequent re-perusal of the passages to find out if they were "right" — which was wrong. Words, sentences, paragraphs are not intended to be mulled over and worried about. They constitute

the fabric or running continuity of a book. To single out specific effects (such as the rather forced antithesis between the words right and wrong which I have just used above, for instance) from their context and give them concentrated attention instead of the mere passing attention for which they are designed very naturally wears them out. There are no verbal ironclads which can stand unlimited reiteration. And the writer who weakly throws out "inspirations" which *to him* have since gone cold, is frequently doing nothing more than diluting his own self. It is as if the writer, the stage director and the actors in a play should abandon the final presentation because its lines, after days and weeks of rehearsal, had become stale and flat.

As soon as man ascribes the beauty of an art work to any quality or combination of qualities he lays himself open to the rejoinder — then by all means let us make certain that all art works which we create in the future possess that quality or combination of qualities, and even more important let us make doubly certain that no art works possess the opposite of that quality. If that quality, for example, were truth or harmony, then there must be no untruths at all, no disharmonies whatever in our art works, not ever; not even for a second, not for variety, for spice nor for contrast. How obviously wrong this is. How apparent it is that if a critic advocates sincerity or naturalness or intensity it must be with the qualification — either expressed or understood — that at the present moment, and as the world is traveling we are suffering a deficiency of sincerity or naturalness or intensity.

An artist has to run the gauntlet in this world and take his chances as to likes and dislikes. There are no "perfections" which free him of this risk.

In the moment that he tightens himself up and adopts

procedural rigidities he subjects himself to limitations. Whistler dogmatically stated that a painting is "finished" when all signs of the manner of its creation are concealed; and he continued throughout his life to paint according to this supposed maxim — with no other result, of course, than that he was confined within a restricted area of art instead of retaining his freedom to roam anywhere he desired.

Anton Raphael Mengs said: —

"A group (of figures) should be composed of an odd number, such as 3, 5, 7 etc. . . . and must be set thickest towards the center Never let two limbs — two arms or two legs — of the same figure appear in an identical foreshortening. Let no limb be repeated and if you show the outer side of the right hand you must show the inner side of the left."*

And Leonardo da Vinci said: —

"Never set the heads of your figures straight above the shoulders, but turn them sideways to the left or right."**

It is plain enough to see — although Mengs and da Vinci apparently failed to see — what the causality of these statements really is. They were prompted by a desire to avoid the tiring effect of sameness and monotony, as does the vibrato which the violinist imparts to his sustained notes. And to that extent they were useful. But why not frankly express them in such terms then, instead of in the terms of eternal dogmas.

The contemplation of a single cube soon tires the observer. The contemplation of a cube *and a cone* tires the observer less rapidly. The contemplation of a cube and a cone *with a flag flying from its summit* tires the

*Quoted from *Artists on Art* by Goldwater and Treves.

***ibid*

observer even less rapidly. But does that warrant the statement: when you paint a cube always add a cone with a flag flying from its summit? Yet in practicality, this statement corresponds exactly to the statements of Mengs and da Vinci. They have the purpose — all three of them — of *delaying the arrival of fatigue*; nothing more. They are a means for postponing, not for avoidance. And by their dodging of the main issue they do more harm than good. Imagine the eventual tediousness of an art in which *all* groups of figures were painted according to these precepts — in which *all* hands hung alternately with the fronts or backs showing — in which all heads turned to the left or right! An artist cannot succeed in his pursuit of untiredness by any specific device for doing so, because the device, no matter how clever or subtle, in its turn becomes wearisome. The search for unfatigue must be left completely free and untrammelled to go where it will, even “backwards”, so to speak, to a place which formerly had been occupied by its opposite, Fatigue. For it is just as important to realize the power of abstention to *cure* fatigue as to realize the power of reiteration to *cause* it. The propounding of any *one best way to do things* simply sends artists — at least those who are subservient — crowding into that “one best way” with the result that it becomes the worst way just so much more rapidly.

Critics — as usual — are largely responsible for this wrong-thinking. They are forever rhapsodizing as to the exact rightness of each last detail in their favorite art work. Change the orientation of a single line in a painting and the entire composition, so they aver, will be “ruined”. Qualify a chiaroscuro either towards less or greater contrast, modulate a color or intensity by an iota and the picture might as well be thrown away. Its “unity”

which they apparently consider a necessary condition for its existence has been destroyed. Now unity — as I have shown elsewhere* — is by no means the pin-point concept which such talk implies. Not only can you miss its exact summit by a good margin and still strike an area where considerable quantities of it are to be found, but, for reasons which I have so often stated**, a miss of the summit can often be a very good thing. But critics don't like easy-going indulgences in their profession. They won't "truckle" with their "ideals"; at least so they say.

The obstructions and hindrances which critics, pedants and theorists have scattered along the path the creative artist must travel are almost unbelievable, both as to number and as to their capacity to do harm. Perhaps the reader may have the impression that the above-quoted misguidances from da Vinci and Mengs have been outgrown and that analogous errors are now no longer current. This is not so at all. Not only are they just as frequently encountered now as formerly, but they must continue to be, for as long as our present incorrect aesthetics prevails.

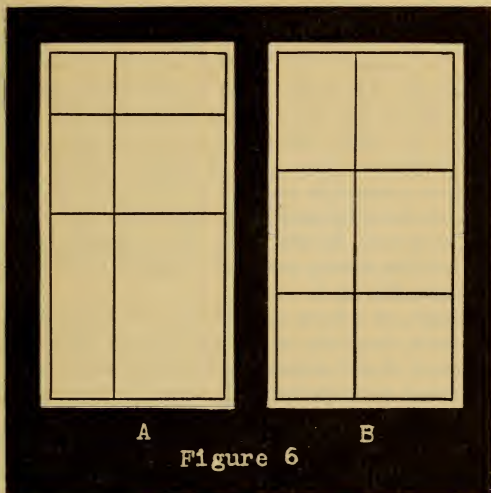
For example, I have before me a book† on artistic design now said to be used in many colleges and universities; and it makes exactly the same mistakes as did Mengs and da Vinci. It implies that a man proves himself to be "artistic" by always preferring the complex to the simple — by always preferring that which loses its beauty slowly to that which loses it beauty rapidly, regardless of their respective *starting* degrees of beauty.

*See Chapter V, "unity" as here employed being really the high point of complexity.

**simply that you can get tired of anything including pictures possessing hundred per cent unity (or complexity).

†*The Art of Color and Design*, by Maitland Graves.

Figure 6 represents one of the many alleged tests of the observer's "innate artistic taste", design A being the one



which the observer — if he possesses this taste — is supposed to prefer. Now obviously the real difference between the two designs is that A is composed of rectangles possessing a greater variety, is farther from the simplicity of understoodness and consequently possesses a slower rate of tiring. These facts, however, by no means tell us which design is at any particular moment the more beautiful, or in "better taste"; and if all artists in the world were to be guided by the author's advice and always favor A over B, A would soon be far the *less* beautiful.

Nor does the book explain how it happens that — in spite of A's superiority over B — the windows in our

homes and office buildings seem much more closely patterned to B than to A. Actually the explanation of this latter phenomenon is merely that simple and obvious designs (like B) when used in much larger designs do not need to possess the individual resistance to reiteration which might (or might not) be important when they themselves are the *entire* design. In fact, if in the facade of some great office building all its myriad windows were designed with the variety of rectangles manifested in A the tendency would be to force the design of that facade backwards down its complexity cycle towards a simplicity of mixed-up-ness. In which case this allegedly better design would be having exactly the opposite effect than it was supposed to have.

Although, as I have said, there is no one point in the range from simplicity to complexity (or unity) where an art work should necessarily be placed so far as *beauty* is concerned, nevertheless if the artist, for reasons of his own, wants to produce an art work which, however great or small that beauty may be, shall lose that beauty slowly, then there are certain factors to which he must give special consideration. In the first place the intensity of the emotion must not be too great. Manifestly the more strongly it is felt the more rapid the tiring of it. But that is not so much the point here as that the loss of beauty shall be even *all through the art work*. Of Rossini's more than forty operas, nearly all of which were originally successful, only one, *The Barber of Seville*, is now currently being performed. A satiety of it can be attained, of course, but that satiety seems to be acquired at an even rate all through the opera. There is no highly uncomplex portion of it which builds up weariness ahead of the rest. And when, after abstinence, the hunger for the opera is renewed, it is renewed

for the whole of it and not for a part. In his other operas this appears not to be the case. There are certain sections of them — as the overtures of *William Tell* and of *Semiramide*, for instance — which retain their attraction with considerable persistence. These sections are consequently separated from the balance of the opera to which they belong and are re-performed individually when the occasion arises, but it apparently has become impossible to recreate a fatigue pattern under which the entire operas would again be uniformly enjoyable.

This does not mean that simplicity and complexity cannot be mixed in the same art work. But when simplicities are included they must be *subordinated* — like the “simple” windows in the facade of the office building — in such manner that their tendency to lose their beauty rapidly will be offset by a less intense perception of them.

It must not be forgotten however, that one can tire of extreme simplicities *so rapidly* that the obtrusive employment of them, in any art work requiring a measurable degree of contemplation, is ruled out for all practical purposes. Simplicities therefore are more dangerous than complexities. They can do more damage than complexities; but under the proper circumstances and when they can be kept under control, they can also do immeasurably more good. They are for the adventurous, daring artist, consequently, not for the cautious and wary. The artist who searches the familiar world about him and exploits a trend which others have not used — either from oversight or fear — is the artist of simplicity. He who penetrates outwards into unexplored territories is the artist of complexity. Obviously we need both kinds.

* * * *

If an artist avails himself of his privilege of producing art works according to any one of many conceivable

formulas — instead of the supposedly “one best” — is he acting contrary to his “artistic integrity”? Not at all. The term has no real pertinence to artistic creation and is simply another catch-phrase invented by critics to lend an appearance of moral right to their tyrannizing over us.

A great many artists unfortunately have fallen victim to this cant — among them being Ryder, who said: —

“The artist needs but a roof, a crust of bread and his easel and all the rest God gives him in abundance. He must live to paint and not paint to live. He cannot be a good fellow; he is rarely a wealthy man, and upon the pot boiler is inscribed the epitaph of his art.”*

I cannot imagine how the thought could have been more orthodoxly nor platitudinously expressed — even if a critic had been guiding his hand.

With all due respect for the resources inherent in the art of painting, it nevertheless cannot be said that a mere participation in it constitutes complete living. An artist needs a broader understanding than he can thus obtain if he wishes best to equip himself for his profession.

And how pathetic and trite is the statement that the artist must live to paint and not paint to live. And how exactly wrong! An artist's so-called “integrity” only very remotely influences his work — unless self-consciously. When he most conspicuously appears to have disregarded everything in order to paint in a certain manner, that indicates not the making of any special sacrifice on his part — either consciously or unconsciously — but merely the extreme seriousness of his emotional ill health. It means that his tiredness of the art works which have been providing his aesthetic sustenance has grown to such an extreme that he must produce something com-

*See *Artists on Art*, compiled by Goldwater and Treves.

pletely different or die. It's a matter of self-preservation. To say that he "lives to paint" is a totally inadequate expressing of the emergency. On the contrary he *paints to live*. Therein is exactly his motivation.

Of course this tiredness which is the driving force behind creative artists has many variants of itself — not always of a purely aesthetic nature — not always concerned, that is, with "fine arts". Sometimes it is caused not by a surfeit of individually created art works but by a surfeit of that composite art work which mankind collectively produces — and endeavors to force upon its members, regardless of their individualities — namely a "customary mode of life". And no doubt it is the methods used by artists to escape from fatigues of this kind which our doctrinaires like to characterize as contrary to artistic integrity. "Catering to popular taste", or "prostituting their talents" are the charges which we have the ingratitude to bring against these providers of our day-to-day nourishment simply because we are told to do so by critics — and at the very moment when critics are deliberately fooling us with doctrines which they do not even believe themselves. Are there to be no more pleasure-loving, florid, expansive beings in the world to whom it is a physical necessity to be noticed, to do spectacular things, to make money and cut a wide swathe in life — no Benvenuto Cellini, no Rubens, no Dumas, no Casanova, no Barnum, no Sargent, no John Barrymore? Possibly Sargent had a more worldly objective than Ryder and the fact may be evident in his pictures; but Sargent painted more than pictures, he painted pictures *plus Sargent*. Dumas wrote novels, *plus Dumas*. Let me assure you that individuals such as these are just as much needed — for the mere manner of their lives — and would be just as keenly missed as the man

whose sole amour is with his easel. An artist does not become an artist simply by living in an attic and never making any money. It is one way, but there are also other ways.

Even the exhibitionist, the man who rides the barrel over Niagara Falls, the flag-pole sitter, the cut-up, though he operates at a rather low level and the proportion of novelty in his performance only barely overbalances the lack of it, still furnishes an essential ingredient in the panorama of life.

When you look on art as the creation and distribution of emotional flavors — all of them being at least potentially beneficial — not only do these petty prejudices about how the artist should conduct himself disappear, but an immense number of puerile — and hurtful — bickerings as to the way art itself (in its wholeness) ought to behave, are done away with. The senseless arguments as to the relative value of realism and romanticism, of tradition and modernism, of clarity and obscurity,* of morality and immorality are done away with. To be “academic” or “merely photographic” in painting ceases to be necessarily either for or against success. There is no reason why unfatigues cannot be attained in that direction as well as any other. It may be more *difficult* in that direction, because it is the direction of orthodoxy, it is the direction which the man who lets other people think for him *usually* takes, it is the direction where there is consequently the most competition, but that does not mean that success may not be there achieved.

Nor need critics any longer react in horror at every innovation or non-conformity which an artist happens to introduce. They need no longer swoon at distortion

*See pages 41-42 for an example of such an argument.

nor choke with rage at Greenwich Village's latest didos, nor condescend to jazz, nor rush to the protection of Bach or Beethoven, nor shudder at Bouguereau, Ella Wheeler Wilcox, Ethelbert Nevin or any other artist whom the extremely precise happen to be running down at the time, nor fulminate against pot-boilers nor act the censor. They can tend to their business instead.

Consider, for example, the waste of time and energy involved in building such an appalling hate of "modernism" as is expressed in the following comment by a well known critic*: —

"What the modernist needs is a drastic purgation of conceit and wilfulness, a thorough educational overhauling. Let us suppose a wine-taster, confronted by a dozen filled glasses. As he passes from vintage to vintage, distinguishing between them, it never occurs to him to doubt the fundamental nature of the most differing varieties. But neither does he have any doubt when he comes to the last glass, tastes it, and finds that someone has filled it with asafoetida. He spews it out with the remark that it is not wine If art as it has been known for some thousands of years is art, then modernism remains plain modernism, a totally different thing.

"It springs largely from mental confusion. The Army tests showed that out of a multitude of candidates for military service there was a certain astonishing percentage of adult males with the reasoning power of a child. It is courteous to assume that the delicate and beautiful art of thinking is a universal attribute, but everybody knows perfectly well that there are thousands of nominally intelligent humans going about, creatures well-born, well-educated, solvent and respon-

*Royal Cortissoz.

sible, who in their moments display the mental power of trepanned rabbits. The central error of modernism is this inability to think things out."

There is an anger discernible in these paragraphs which seems to be the result of something much more than a mere *strong distaste* for modern art — more even than a scorn for it. It seems rather to be a terror — a dread that there is more value to such art than the critic dares concede even to himself, and that if it prevails then all the beliefs and standards which he has so long and so insistently been proclaiming fall to ruin — and a lifetime of devotion to them is demonstrated to have been completely futile — to have been thrown away on a delusion.

In fact, for the benefit of those critics who — though there are few that now continue to fight the obviously lost battle against "modernism" — are nevertheless still obstinately defending the same fallacies which brought about the battle — a warning may be read between these bitter lines of a defeated man as to how easily they might themselves end up in a similar frustration.

Or give thought to the wrath into which another distinguished critic* lashes himself apropos of what appears to most people a rather interesting innovation: —

"I have actually heard the epithet beautiful applied to sky-scrapers," he says. "Now sky-scrapers may be picturesque or vital, or what you will, though they are usually not much more than a mixture of megalomania and commercialism. But even though they did express fully the race of industrial and financial titans that now has us in its grip, they would still fall short of being beautiful."

Assuming that this is purely an artistic appraisal

*Irving Babbitt in *The New Laocoon*.

rather than a working off of animosity at those who make more money than the connoisseur of belles lettres, it still remains difficult to account for. After all, a disinterested examination of the situation leads one to believe that there is hardly a perception in the world which if it were presented to the view of all mankind would attain such a high average of pleasurability as the New York City sky-line. The impact on the man who has not before seen it is tremendous, no matter how high or low his cultural level. Even New Yorkers themselves, inured as they are by its proximity, occasionally glance at it with a certain awed delight. And to prove my point still better: I venture the prediction that among the strictest adherents of what is called "absolute beauty" — than whom no mortals on earth have their emotional enjoyments more rigidly trained towards the correct objectives — men who can never enjoy a rectangle on account of the greater harmony of an oval, nor a straight line on account of the finer rhythm of a curve — even among these melancholy pedants I believe there would be a sizable percentage who would here "intuit", to use their own nomenclature, the existence of beauty.

However, it is not among critics alone that this wasteful squabbling does its greatest hurt. The bad habit has spread by contagion into the ranks of creative artists — and to such an extent that immense quantities of their energy — which should be employed for constructive purpose — are dissipated by rumpuses about nothing. If an artist hates certain art works, fine. Such antipathies spur him to greater creation. But when he assumes from them that some frightful heresy is abroad and that he and his friends must at once conduct a crusade against the scoundrels who have been promulgating it, then the damage begins. It requires only a glance at the history

of art to perceive the disruptive effect of this childish turmoil. The manifestoes, challenges, defiances, the verbal fisticuffs, the journalistic combats have been endless — the campaigns to conscript new recruits to fight for or against the classicists, or modernists, or impressionists, or preraphaelites or cubists have been persistent and exhausting. Whistler brings a silly legal action against Ruskin for a few inept words and impoverishes himself by doing so, Degas airs vapid sarcasms at the expense of David; Michelangelo intrigues against Raphael and so on, until the time and the capacity left over for art have been substantially cut down. How ridiculous this all seems when art's fundamental purpose is perceived — when the influences of fatigue and distribution are recognized. An artist very reasonably may *avoid* art works of which he is tired; he may, under certain circumstances (and with many reservations), have a low opinion of their creators' intellectual attainment, but to involve himself in a battle of words with those creators is as childish as to shower blows upon your bed because you are not sleepy or upon a beef steak because at the moment you have no appetite for it, instead of blaming those responsible for giving the proper distribution to things — responsible, that is, for having bed and beef steak on hand when you want them and out of the way at other times.

The stimulating force of competition and rivalry will not be reduced if we cease making a personal issue out of our fellow artists' methods. It will simply be turned in the fruitful direction of research and invention instead of frittered away on irrelevant jealousies and intrigues.

The artist, if he desires (either for humanitarian or commercial reasons) to produce art works which will seem beautiful to other persons than himself *must study*

fatigue patterns — just as must the critic. There is no way of avoiding that. But this is by no means the same as saying that he must “give the public what it wants” or produce merely “popular” art. It is his privilege — exactly as it is the critic’s — to stipulate the particular fatigue pattern in which he is interested, whether it belongs to a large number of persons or a small, whether to men who are normal or abnormal, young or old, rich or poor, stupid or intelligent. Or he can create in relation to a fatigue pattern which does not yet but, in his opinion, *will* exist at some future time when there are more persons in the world of his appreciative capacity. Or again, he can even create in relation to a fatigue pattern which he thinks *ethically should* exist when men have learned better to govern their actions according to the moral principles he approves. Exactly which of these or other policies he elects to adopt seems to be a matter of purely individual choice, analogous to the choice a sociologically-minded person might be called upon to make as to whether he should direct his efforts to the prompt alleviation of man’s urgent distresses or to an endeavor to discover and cure the root-causes of those distresses.

The *immediate* creation of beauty is like surf-board riding. The artist must first find and mount a wave or trend. Then he must maintain the precarious position; and when the wave flattens out or breaks, he must search for another. That is the method for the creation of *immediate* beauty. For the creation of *subsequent* beauty he must either *anticipate* a wave, or else initiate one by his own effort.

No artist has either right or cause to complain if the public do not like (or “appreciate”) the art works he produces. By what law has he any claim upon the commendation of his fellows, or any authority to demand

that they perceive beauty in the direction that he chances to! If he is fortunate enough to be born more intelligent than the rest of us, is that not sufficient in itself? Must we, besides suffering from our own stupidity, also be blamed because when he creates art in the full measure of his superiority the very natural result is that we are unable to comprehend him? Let him display his greater wisdom by a proper patience — by lifting us gradually towards the heights he so easily attains instead of expecting us to reach there in one leap and shouting maledictions at us for our incapacity. The wails and lamentations in which we now indulge for civilization's failure to recognize great men in their lifetimes is as futile as complaints that we cannot swim like a duck or fly like a bird. It may be true that Schubert, Keats and other "geniuses" died young because we failed to evaluate their achievements, but there simultaneously died young — from plagues and diseases which we have since found means to conquer (and perhaps should sooner have learned to conquer) — a countless number of other men who in themselves or in their descendants might have accomplished even more for us than Schubert and Keats could have. Wide differences in human ability seem to be necessary phenomena of life which by themselves inevitably produce other phenomena — among them being the time-lag in the mass's comprehension of what its advance guard has done. It would seem that such a situation would be taken for granted — and no doubt it would be if critics were to cease pretending that beauty was some mysterious and magic essence which everybody could and should feel independently of their intelligences and fatigue patterns.

* * * *

As to the so-called *enduring power* of art works, this is a matter to which the artist has been giving a great

deal too much attention. It no doubt flatters him that he has produced an art work which is so far "ahead" of most men's present progression to complexity that they will require a *long time* to catch up with him and learn the lesson he has set for them. The length of time required for that process of catching up is by no means a *true measure*, however, of the distance by which he has surpassed them. There are other considerations involved. The delay can be due, for one thing, merely to man's inadvertence — analogous to the preoccupation that would delay him in reading a note that was left for him on the mantelpiece. Many paths to complexity are available for men and because they chance to concern themselves with others before getting around to the one in which the artist has been working does not prove that his advance there was especially extensive.

Or again, the delay may be due simply to mechanical problems of distribution which make it difficult for men to have perception of his art work except very occasionally. Does the endurance of his art work's pleurability which results merely from the short-rationing of men — from the mere tantalizing of them, as it were, in the way that the donkey might be by the food dangling just beyond his mouth — constitute a proof of its lasting merit?

On the other hand, even if it can be said that outright backwardness or stupidity accounts for the delay in appreciation do we not sense a certain smallness in the artist who should hope that that stupidity be overcome *very slowly* in order that his art work, by that happening, should last a little longer?

Yet it is by one of these methods or another that art works endure. They endure merely through humanity's carelessness, inefficiency or stupidity — nothing else.

In spite of all this, critics are still clinging desperately

to the old dogma of the *test of time* and endeavoring to justify themselves with empty and pretentious verbosity.

One of them*, in connection with the fiftieth anniversary of Verdi's death, says: —

" longevity is the supreme testimony to the value of a work of art. There is no other equal criterion. And the duration of the art work seems to rest fundamentally upon two things: the truthfulness of its emotional expression and the strength and beauty of its form. Neither quality can be absent and the work of art endure."

It requires a great deal more than a few vague and sonorous generalities to validate a theory such as this.

* * * *

There seems to be no reason why any artist worthy of the name should object to the rapid permeation of what he has created through the consciousness of all mankind, even if that means that it is superficially "forgotten". From a broader view it is not forgotten. It has simply played its due part in the progress of man; and that part may be just as vital as the part contributed by "masterpieces" which have been kept alive by the inadequacies of humanity or by the laudations of critics who have their eyes out for business.

If an engineer completely removes the hidden reef upon which the ship may be wrecked, has he not accomplished as much — or even more — than he who erects a light-house there? Does the fact that the *presence* of the light-house is better publicity than the absence of the reef change the relative value of what they did?

If there were not plenty of men about who are not merely tired of the art works which critics call eternally beautiful, but actually disgusted with them, new art

*Olin Downes in the New York Times of January 21, 1951.

works would not be created. Or to put it differently that which is saving art from extinction is that there are at least a few artists who have not been deceived by the advice critics give them and in fact have the sense and courage to go absolutely opposite to that advice.

Chapter XI

CONSEQUENCES TO MAN; LONGEVITY

THOUGH the consequences of Factual Aesthetics to criticism and to the creative artist are notable, I think it may safely be said that in relation to *man in general* they are even more so.

Possibly the first and most obvious one of them is in the enlarging of art — the making it, that is, into a more pervasive influence which concerns every phase of life.

Present-day theories, obviously, have been in the opposite direction — towards making it small and exclusive. First there are important phenomena or activities of life which have been specifically shut out of art on the ground that they are not aesthetic ("aesthetic" being defined in whatever manner made it possible to do so), among the frequently banished parts being Nature, Science and Usefulness. Second there have been excluded the supposedly less worthy exemplars of art — the "catchy" tunes, the "trivial" or "shallow" short stories, novels, plays, poems, moving pictures; the "insignificant" or "frivolous" paintings, architectures or sculptures. These have been consigned to oblivion for their inability to meet the test of time, and in order to provide room for those "entirely different" art works which *have* met the test of time and thus really belong in art — although the most that can be said of them is that they still are being talked about after an existence, for the vast majority of them, representing less than one thousandth of one per cent of man's history on earth.

All of these exclusions are senseless; and serve only as an excuse for the pedant to indulge his propensity to divide, subdivide and classify, whether there are any natural lines of cleavage for doing so or not. Between art and nature there is no one place where a division can be more appropriately made than another. Science and art are inseparable parts of each other. Usefulness rather than being severed from art is actually its essence. And as to the oblivion which some exemplars of art disappear into, that is simply a demonstration of man's inefficiency rather than of his discrimination. Furthermore, there have also disappeared into this oblivion a large number of happenings, thoughts and expressions whose resurrection therefrom we would now pay a very large price to achieve if we knew how to do it.

The kind of art which appertains to Factual Aesthetics has no resemblance whatever to this shrunken and mutilated perversion of itself which has so long and obstinately been forced upon us. It is a *universality*, the summation of mankind's instinct to self-preservation. Everything that man has done, thought, seen or felt (or will do, think, see or feel) is included within it. Every phenomenon of nature, every concept of science, every item of commerce, every eclipse, every degree of longitude, every mountain, tree or valley, every tidal wave, volcanic eruption or poisonous gas; every hammer, saw, pistol, stubbing of the toe, lie, automobile, paper clip, toothache, scandal, piccolo, scorpion, sewer system, pick-pocket, disease, dragon, mania, microbe, mystery, ghoul, pelican or maggot belongs to art. Each one belongs because each one — even a single grain of sand or a drop of water — possesses an emotional flavor differing in some degree (no matter how slightly) from its closest approximation and is consequently, for the one

tiredness pattern to which it conforms, the one emotion which will completely rest and resolve that pattern. And no instrumentality to that end should be left out — not one.

Of course, at the lower levels of complexity — in that vast conglomeration of art works composed of things that nearly everybody can do or of things that are nearly everywhere available, the probabilities of beauty are low and of indifference high. But that doesn't mean that we are to discard them. Uglinesses are simply excesses of what once were and again may become beauties. A completely efficient method of distribution (which we are presupposing) should be able to keep them out of circulation when not needed and produce them when they become needed even if that need (as for the refuse pile, the train-wreck or the crime of passion) may be satisfied in the smallest fraction of a second. Man's brutalities and mistakes, wounds and sufferings are necessary constituents of life, and his occasional desire to sense them in other persons — and perhaps even in himself — is neither "morbidity" nor "degeneracy".

It may be true that man can frequently improvise the less complex flavors of life and create on short notice a ninety-five per cent approximation to them — which is perhaps near enough for practical purposes. This does not alter, however, the advantage, *in theory*, of a completely maintained stock of emotions. It merely indicates that we can afford to be a little less painstaking at the levels of greater simplicity where the supply is larger and can also more quickly be replenished, than at the higher levels where a loss may be irreplaceable. What is important is to look on the disappearance of things into oblivion not as a meritorious accomplishment which proves our "good taste" — not as a token of our willing-

ness to get along without "the inferior" — but as a failure of our inventiveness, as a sign of laziness and incapacity.

When we perceive art as possessing this universality we are again reminded of the illogicality of any degrees of betterness in it, and, of course, even more conspicuously of the illogicality of the concept of "perfection". Not only do we see how senseless it is to say — as has been said* — that Lovelace's poem *Lucasta* "contains no line or part of a line that could by any possibility be improved" but we realize that under due circumstances and under the ascendancy of certain easily conceivable fatigue patterns there would be no change at all which would not be — at least temporarily — an improvement.

The next two consequences of Factual Aesthetics which I shall discuss are not overly attractive — at least not on the surface. In fact they represent what I had in mind when I stated in an opening chapter that attached to what I considered the *general validity* of Factual Aesthetics there was an extreme — perhaps to some temperaments even an excessive — "practicality" or "unidealism".

The first of these consequences is that man is required to adopt a somewhat skeptical or at least neutral attitude about his ability to increase his own happiness — of which you have probably felt the gradual infiltration as, from page to page, much has been written about the importance of pleasure but nothing about the raising of its general average. Now I have no intention of taking a dogmatic stand on so controversial a subject. It is entirely conceivable that man has made a notable advance in his over-all felicity and can continue doing so, but even if that be so there appears to be no definite way of demonstrating the fact. It must always remain a ques-

*See page 9.

tion — like man's immortality — on which each individual must reach his own personal decision. Consequently, to demand that aesthetics be an influence towards greater happiness or else concede its inutility — when there could never be proof as to whether or not it had succeeded — amounts to demanding that aesthetics nullify itself. And inasmuch as aesthetics has an entirely legitimate objective of its own, outside of the matter of happiness, there is no reason why it should commit suicide by contending for one which more properly belongs to theology. Let me repeat, Factual Aesthetics and art may conceivably add to man's happiness; but I make no such claim for them.

The second seemingly rather dismal consequence is that we must accept, and even invite, the *destruction of beauty* — the lowering, that is, of every art work in the world to the indifference level. What critics have delighted to call "eternal masterpieces" will become, emotionally (though not historically), mere commonplaces of life. Millet's Sower, Goya's Nude Maja, Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, Beethoven's Sonata Appassionata, Bizet's Carmen, when presented to man's perception, will be felt by him, not with the raptures now considered inevitable, but with approximately the impassivity of the touch of one finger to another, the rustle of the window curtain, the fall of a leaf, or the multiplication table.

What, of course, will have happened is something exceedingly normal — according to the doctrine of Factual Aesthetics — namely that man will have passed so completely through the complexity cycles of these art works and reduced them all to such a simplicity of understoodness that he will require only very brief and infrequent perceptions of them — a perception which can safely be left to routine control just as now are the tem-

perature of our houses or the delivery of milk to the kitchen door. Each one will be properly apportioned according to the Pattern of Equal Beauty rather than randomly dispersed; and the excesses of beauty (or of pain) which previously had existed in these and other of today's art works, as a result of distributional accident and bad luck, will be largely eliminated. When I said earlier that a jaded taste towards art works was a satisfactory kind of a taste to have, this was what I meant. And we perceive again how diametrically wrong is the current notion of artistic endurance as exemplified by William Empson's allegation* that critics should *spare their tastes* in order to discriminate more accurately between the "good" and the "bad", and by doing so to retain as beautiful what previously had been beautiful.

To some persons all this may sound horrible; almost as if the world were coming to an end. But there is no need for alarm. Though some of life's romance may be lost in thus conceding the impermanence of man's "greatest" accomplishments — in contrast to the divinity with which critics have tried to endow them — yet there are offsetting advantages of very decided force. By means of them factual aesthetics — cold though it may be — seems, nevertheless, to give us a rewarding sense of being closer to observed facts — of being nearer to what we call the truth than before. We are no longer required not to see what shines like the sun before our eyes, nor to degrade our dignity to cheap hypocrisies, nor to infect the rising generations, through their innocent confidence in our "deeper wisdom", with cant and pietisms which we ourselves have long ceased to believe. Though it does not inspire the enthusiasms that a more glamorous picturing might do, neither does it eventually lead us to an

*on page 24.

intellectual collapse which is all the more destructive because of its being deferred to the later years of life and because of the immense structure of infatuation and self-deceit which we have by then built upon it. Nor need there be any fears that a psychological lethargy will result therefrom. Quite the contrary. It is an extinguishing only of beauties *now current* and it is exactly that extinguishing — as I have already said — which establishes the conditions under which the impulse (even the necessity) to create new art works, with new potentialities for beauty, is most strongly stimulated. Each destruction of beauty engenders new beauty — automatically.

Of course, even now, in the present state of maldistribution, there is creation of new art works — but not in full efficiency; nor in an approximation of it. Much is mere waste-creation. Sometimes this waste-creation is caused by an artist's misguided pursuit of some allegedly "eternal standard of beauty" — some "flavor", that is, of which, under this artificial inducement, man will soon have or may already have an excess. Sometimes it is caused by the fact that a certain already-created art work happens not to be available at the particular place or time where it is emotionally needed, and consequently another artist — whether knowingly or unknowingly — expends his energies in the production of an imitation of it. An enormous volume of this unnecessary repetition is now hindering and obstructing man's progress — requiring artists to divert their creative efforts for the remedy of situations which should be relieved by mechanical processes*.

No doubt this coordination of distribution with creation, the thus making universally available to all mankind of every art work from the moment of its birth, is impossible. But there can and should be much closer

*such as phonograph records, color reproductions, cheap reprints etc.

parallelism between them than there has been; and unquestionably a major cause of the failure is this senseless and pernicious doctrine of the eternity and sacredness of beauty. Our grand panjandrums of loveliness from Ruskin down, bewailing the machine age, rending their garments at mass production, swooning with aesthetic agony if a color print of Titian's "Sacred and Profane Love" changes a tint by a microscopism, or if a phonograph record qualifies a Bach crescendo by an iota, regretting even that the prints and records were made, have not been the guardians and protectors of art — as they have visioned themselves to be — but rather its saboteurs and obstructionists. Man may have certain respect for Dante, Cervantes, Goethe, Raphael, Shakespeare, Rodin, Tolstoi or Emerson, but to permit it to develop into adoration, to allow such artists or any others to acquire permanences, infallibilities, god-heads is absolutely to deny and reverse the very impulse which spurred these men to accomplish what they did. They created as an escape from the growing inadequacy of the art-world they lived in; why should we abandon that policy. Our gratitude for their work has now been sufficiently expressed. May their creations next be neutralized; and the sooner the better. Man must surpass them as the searchlight surpasses the wax candle, as the strato-cruiser surpasses the stage-coach, as television surpasses the penny post. As to whether or not this can be done, a mere glance at the pages of history should give the answer. I cannot imagine that even those infatuated simpletons who are so hypnotized by the present and proximate as to speak of eternity in the same breath with the relatively trivial deeds which men happen to have done so far, could exalt themselves into a sufficient frenzy outrightly to deny it.

I think it is plain, therefore, that this "consequence" of Factual Aesthetics — this destruction of beauty, that is — which at first seemed an undesirable consequence is actually an advantageous one.

And it acquires a still greater advantage through its being — as I shall endeavor to show — a necessary instrumentality in what I have all along declared to be art's one and only purpose — namely the prolongation of man's stay on earth, the conferring upon him of a greater LONGEVITY.

This does not mean that art develops this objective of augmenting man's life expectancy as a consequence of Factual Aesthetics. Not at all. Art has always had that objective. There is no other that it *could* have. But it has not generally been *conceded* as having it; for the reason that it is impossible to concede it and still palm off on humanity the brand of aesthetics which now prevails. Remove from about art the mystic aura in which it now vaguely hovers, bring it out into the daylight by making it responsible for man's good health, and at once all the pompous maxims and tenets which have been dinned in our ears for centuries collapse from their own weight — not because they should be replaced by newer ones, but because tied to each one of them is the obvious unhealthfulness of an unvarying and immoderate adherence to anything. Fanatic and relentless strivings along any specific paths whatever, whether they supposedly lead to "perfection" or to "consistency" are by their nature unhygienic, and accordingly *against* rather than *for* art. Science and Truth, about which we talk so much, are not nearly so often pursued for their own sake as we like to believe. Few people care sincerely about them except indirectly, for what they can do for us. Science is valuable to man

only as an avenue through which the urge to complexity can express itself. Science helps the world become a more complex thing, with more alleys and by-paths to be investigated and more items, events, phenomena and other art works to be observed — and thus reduces the monotony and wear of living. The only value which truth possesses for science is that it prevents man's entering *dead ends*; it prevents him from driving along some course which nowhere connects with other courses — and from which therefore there is no escape except by a retracing of steps.

A "false" science or theory (such as alchemy) is not bad because it is false but because it is confining and restricting. White-Feather Aesthetics is, of course, an outstanding example of a false theory whose lack of anywhere else to go is gradually destroying it. It still pursues its routine functions, true, but hollowly, strickenly, covering its despair and shame under feverish and incoherent fussings over trivialities, under whipped-up passions for this or that product of man's genius or by affected and stagey glorifications of its own eternal principles.

A "true" science or theory, on the other hand, is not good because it is true but because it branches out widely and gives man scope to develop his capacities. Regarded in this light, science is an adjunct or helper to art, participating in a common purpose of extending man's life expectancy.

The world's inhabitants are compositely creating, by their day-to-day thoughts and actions, a World Art Work *for the benefit of their own health and longevity*. The more rich, complex and varied that art work is the longer it will be before men die through their fatigue of it. What we call evil and crime are forces

which hinder and frustrate the creation of such an art work.

What Factual Aesthetics accomplishes therefore is not the changing of art's purpose but the concentrating of our full effort to the sustaining and promotion of that purpose in *every way possible* — and, above all, the bringing to an end of the thwarting of that purpose which White-Feather Aesthetics has been attempting with its various quibbles and bigotries.

As to the attainability, through art, of this purpose — as to whether art in its full breadth — as distinguished from mere eugenics or medicine — contributes to longevity, there seems to be no need for an elaborate proof. That attainability is evident from the moment that we see beauty as pleurability and art as the so manipulating of pleurability that it alleviates man's excessive fatigues: first by the proper distribution of already existing art work (or emotions) and second by the creation of new art works when those already existing have been perfectly distributed and have begun consequently to grow unduly tiring *in their totality*.

It is inconceivable that such a process could *fail* to promote longevity — or that any other process could *as well* promote longevity. To cushion the impact of life upon our nerve systems by an even spreading of that impact through all the segments of the system according to their varying resistant capacities, and then to strengthen and expand that nervous system still more by the activating — through the medium of new and more complex art works — of hitherto dormant or only partly engaged portions of itself: how better than in these words could be expressed the basic formula for health and longer existence?

Mother's milk, though an ideal food for the infant

requires supplementation through a broader diet in order to carry man beyond the earliest years of his life. The boy who finds full scope for his energies in the sand-pile, parallel-bars and other facilities of the amusement park would pine away to an early death if permanently restricted therein. Or imagine the reduction in man's longevity which he would suffer if his perceptions were limited to only three objects in life: boat, tree and dog, say, in the simplest manifestations of themselves; or if language were reduced from its present wealth to a mere dozen or so words. It is through the *complexifying* of life that we attain the *lengthening* of it. What are sometimes called the worry and stress of modern civilization are misnamed so far as there is an implication of harm in the words; they are, on the contrary, the symbols of our enlargement — of the widening of our perceptions — of the stimulating interplay of a myriad nervous reactions which had previously been lying latent and undeveloped in our beings. Nor does there seem to be any foreseeable limit to this expansion. Each release into wider territory, though it frees us from old restraints, reveals new restraints which in their turn must be surmounted.

Man must continue to grow throughout his life, and there must always be opportunities ahead to sustain that growth — opportunities which are there *preferably in advance* merely waiting for him to savor. If he has to create them himself, by his individual effort, then his labor will accrue to succeeding generations, but the wear and tear of the creation — the extreme unbalances of fatigue and unfatigue which they engender — may act against his own longevity. That is why men of genius who exhaust *early in their lives* the art resources that are available in the field where their genius manifests

itself — who must then by their own unaided efforts hew out an escape from the constrictions that are galling them — often have a short span of existence. To climb the complexity cycle of an already existent art work, though it may not be easy, is as child's play compared to the original producing of it.

Consequently there are two roads to an early death — first that which I have just shown — namely an “excessive” *capacity* to learn which brings a *premature* collision with the outer boundaries of art — and second an excessive *incapacity* to learn. Whether that incapacity is caused by stupidity or by mere lack of opportunity* is immaterial. In either case it causes an undue concentration of wear on man's primitive or simple reactions. and fails to call into play his more complex reactions — thus, of course, obtaining the support of his nerve system only in limited sections of it instead of in its entirety.

A man makes his own fatigue pattern — at least in part — by the directions in which he moves. If he makes himself too superior to other men, he can hardly expect a substantial satisfying of that pattern in a world that is adjusted to the majority and in an art whose “principles” are enunciated by his inferiors.

Other factors being equal**, it would seem that the man who finds himself with a rapid capacity for learning *and also* an ample supply of things to learn in the direction where his talents lie has the best chance of longevity.

The necessity to destroy beauty, which I have so much emphasized, must not be interpreted as demanding also the destruction of the art works which previously possessed that beauty (or pleasurability). The fact that I

*as, for example, in the above imaginary case of man being confined for his entire life in a child's amusement park.

**as of organic health and encounter with accident.

advocate the keeping available for perception every art work that ever was created precludes any such idea. It demands merely that these art works be so well distributed that, as long as events maintain their normal course, with no earth-cataclysms, no volcanic eruptions, no glacial incursions, no world-wars, no rail-strikes nor power-line failures even, their pleasurabilities are limited to trivial fluctuations above or below man's indifference level.

A book such as Bartlett's *Familiar Quotations*, is to be regarded not in its usual light as a *conservator* of beauty, but more correctly as an *eradicator* of beauty, or, if not that, at least as a *domesticator* of beauty — that is, as a medium by which previously wild and uncontrolled beauties have been tamed and made into household companions.

These ancient beauties are gradually thrust down, so to speak, into lower and lower strata of man's consciousness, where they are energized less and less frequently and in constantly lower force — but where they nevertheless perform a useful though unspectacular role. In periods of lassitude man will no longer be restricted to a dull mental revamping of the commonplace of the day. He will have a better way of annulling the obsessions and annoyances of his more active periods than studying the pattern of the rug, tapping the arms of his chair or counting the passing automobiles. His mind will have learned to convert — in the manner that a prism transforms white light into a rainbow of color — the most "ordinary" incident into a kaleidoscope of images and fancies and then disperse them healthfully through the countless paths and trails of his nerve systems. The whole present day range of complex emotions which we now look on with awe and can only occasionally savor, will be at his

beck and call. Their delectability will have been reduced to the barest remnant of that which they previously possessed; but how can we question the hygienic benefit to man's nervous organism of this vast variety and wealth of feelings, even when they find expression only in the tiniest deviation from neutrality. Man's resistance to the stress of life will be immeasurably strengthened by them. He will be able to shift the daily wear and tear, at will, from one sensory channel to another, and then to another and another up to the whole repertory of art, before exhaustion and fatigue can tax any one channel into such extremes of pain as actually to injure it. Not only that, but the existence of this great area of calm to which man may retire for rest and refreshment without unduly damaging doses of monotony will immensely increase his emotional stamina and ambition, will incite him to risk those tremendous and fearful excursions into that "forbidden" realm of life's ecstasies and raptures which, though it may drive him reeling back into prostration and despair, will nevertheless supply him with the impetus for the engendering of resplendent and hitherto unimagined beauties. And that impetus is fostered, not by rhapsodizings about the charm and perfection of the beauties we now have, but by constant reminders, on the contrary, of their evanescence—by exhortations to destroy them through more efficient distribution, and thus make place for new.

Chapter XII

WAR ON CRITICS

IF the concept of art which I have sketched in the preceding chapters is to gain currency; if art's purpose of extending man's span of life is to be encouraged and supported, there is one thing which must first be done: critics — as we know them now — must be deprived of their present authority and reduced to a subordinate role which amounts practically to a silencing of them. Nothing short of that will do. A mere reformation or revamping is not enough.

This is necessary in part from what I have already brought out about them — namely that they are weak and hypocritical, that they are responsible for the muddle we now find ourselves in and are by constitution the contrivers of muddle. But there is a more important reason also — that *they are writers*; and that they are able from that fact to magnify themselves each into the equivalent of an army corps and thus multiply the circulation of their fraudulences a million-fold. That's where the greater danger lies.

Which at once emphasizes another difficulty. If they are writers — and consequently in strong control of the machinery of propaganda — how are we to shake off their hold on us? Charges that their criticism is often wrong and is based on incorrect principles are too vague and academic to generate a sufficient enmity against them to produce any such complete upset. Their counter-

measures would easily repulse an attack based on so undynamic a theme. And what else is there? It is not conceivable, is it, that such apparently benign and inoffensive creatures could have committed an act of sufficient depravity that all mankind would rise against them and demand their instant expulsion. Ah, but it is conceivable; they *have* committed it, and the fact should not in the least surprise us. When men are born — as they are — with a power of persuasion over us which is at least equivalent to the exclusive control of the world's firearms, are we so naive — so obsessed by romantic preachments about altruism — as to doubt that, despite their calculated protests to the contrary, despite our efforts to resist them, they have nevertheless managed somehow to exploit that power for their advantage and against ours? They do exploit it — ruthlessly, and to a magnitude that is understandable only when we remember that they have had centuries to elaborate the procedure. Daily and hourly they are using that power to cause our deaths in greater numbers than do malnutrition and disease. It is *that* which constitutes our main charge against them — not merely timidity or insincerity. They are the wholesale executioners of their fellow men. I assure you that this is not fantasy. Whether their crime is fully purposed; that is, whether it has any more evil objective than to maintain themselves in power; whether it may be no more their fault than ours, is not the point. Need of correction is not thereby reduced. The tiger whelp which has so engagingly romped about our nursery in its infancy will, in later years, be more safely quartered in the zoo. We are supposed to be aware of so obvious a fact, and to proceed accordingly. Similarly, we must perceive writers for what their temperaments cause them to be. We must properly assess them for their mastery over our

better judgments and adopt the necessary precautions, *in advance*, before they have taken over the ship. They cannot be allowed complete liberty of operation any more than can the high voltage power line, or the Mississippi River.

Perhaps in certain subsidiary branches of art a guarded freedom can occasionally be permitted them, but in that central core of art where the whole strategy of life-prolongation is determined, the slightest relaxation of control is out of the question.

Men whose breaths are taken away by the characterizing of a taciturn woman as "my gracious silence"*, who can "hardly keep their voices steady" when reading a grandiosely expressed generality,** men who are so in love with their own emotional susceptibilities (as thus demonstrated) regardless of the fact that a thousand other word-combinations of at least equal inventive felicity — such as *tempest in a teapot*, or *nobody else can know where the shoe pinches* — have become the merest commonplaces, men who are continuously emitting the criminal nonsensicalities of which I have been able to cite only a few brief samples, men of this unbalance, callousness and inhumanity can play no major part in such an activity as aesthetics, where our lives are at stake. Individuals of an entirely different character and training must here be in command, or the wholesale assassination of humanity which is so manifest under the present regime will continue indefinitely. Actualities, facts, logic, analysis must prevail, rather than airy quips and verbal gymnastics.

Let's consider for a moment the writer's attitude towards what we call Truth. As a concept, philosophical

*See page 12.

**See page 14.

wranglings have unfortunately greatly blurred it. But we need truth just the same — *tremendously*. It's the ladder (regardless of how often we may have to repair it) by which we ascend towards more knowledge, greater complexity, longer life. And basically my quarrel with the writer is that he has absolutely no regard or respect for it. That's putting it too mildly. Actually he hates and despises truth; not out of cynicism or prejudice (which might be curable) but because it's an antagonism to his being — because his ability to ignore and flout it is the measure of his ability to write. Truth, in his eyes, is the strength and refuge of the mere amateur. For him, the professional, it's as the life-belt to the expert swimmer — a humiliation, a symbol of inadequacy. It has become a maxim of his trade that "it's not what you say that counts, but how you say it."

"If Shakespeare", declares T. S. Eliot, "had written according to a better philosophy, he would have written worse poetry." Could the validity of my charge be more frankly confessed!

What the writer worships is Plausibility. To build nothing into something, to make falsity believable, to gain credence for a quibble or evasion, therein lies his delight. But to conceive some tremendous veracity and then simply and straight-forwardly expound it is not in his nature. The trashier the theme which he can convert into a ten-strike, so much the greater (not the less) is his accomplishment, just as the slower the horse the jockey spurs to victory, the keener the jockey's satisfaction.

These statements are directed, of course, against writers *in general*. There are some exceptions — especially in science — but not in aesthetics. Quite the contrary. In that field — because it is supposedly at the furthest extreme from science — the more fantastic, whimsical and

extravagant the assertions the better — provided they are “entertainingly” expressed.

The writer has no compunction whatever about composing an entire volume of hundreds of pages on some such ineptitude as that art is “intuition” or “significance”, or that “art endures to eternity”, or that “one art work is intrinsically more beautiful than another”, even though the whole notion falls completely apart under the least analysis. The reader has accepted these fancies for centuries, why change now! The fact that they are vicious fallacies and that such fallacies when inserted deep down in the foundations of books ravage the reader’s body with the same deadly certitude that the microscopic percentage of poison in the honeyed insecticide corrodes the trusting ant and cockroach, disturbs him not the least.

To prolong the lives, therefore, of the sick and gangrenous platitudes of art; to sugar-coat the festering eruptions and inject them into our beings by verbal sorcery and rhetorical craft is not a mere pardonable blunder but aesthetic manslaughter — as inhuman as the one-time practice of inserting lethal chemicals in lipstick to give it a more inviting red; and a thousand times more deadly. There’s no concealing the fact; these writers are exactly against us. We wish to prolong our lives by expanding towards the new, they wish to shorten our lives by confining us in the old. We wish to taste all life’s emotions; to have our fill of them; to establish the pattern of equal beauty; they fight like maniacs against it. “Beauty is eternal”, they cry. We *can’t* be cured of it; we *shouldn’t* be cured of it. We must stay forever in the mal-distribution that produces their favored loveliness, even though that mal-distribution by stressing the emotions we are tired of and forbidding us those we are

untired of, smites us before our day — mows us down, as does the pestilence, by the thousands and millions.

Evidence of the intellectual sweat-shop that they have us incarcerated within is furnished by an extremely revealing poll conducted by the Columbia University Press as to what are the most boring classics — which was reported in part as follows*: —

“In the opinion of the readers of *THE PLEASURES OF PUBLISHING* — editors, booksellers, authors, librarians, teachers, and others — who joined in the balloting, John Bunyan’s ‘Pilgrim’s Progress’ is the classic which has bored the most people the most.

“Following Bunyan in the first ten among boring classics, in order, are: 2. Melville’s ‘Moby Dick’; 3. Milton’s ‘Paradise Lost’; 4. Spenser’s ‘Faerie Queene’; 5. Boswell’s ‘Life of Samuel Johnson’; 6 & 7 (tied), Richardson’s ‘Pamela’ and Eliot’s ‘Silas Marner’; 8. Scott’s ‘Ivanhoe’; 9. Cervantes’ ‘Don Quixote’; 10. Goethe’s ‘Faust’.

“Approximately five percent of the readers of *THE PLEASURES* participated. Presumably the others find no classics boring — or don’t read them. Quite a number of the ballots were group votes, representing the opinions of a whole teaching or library staff. One, signed ‘New York Times Book Review staff,’ put Euripides’ plays at the top of the list. The staff of the University of Wisconsin Press doesn’t like ‘Old Curiosity Shop.’ Eliot’s ‘Mill on the Floss’ topped the list of the editorial staff of the Cincinnati ‘Enquirer.’ Camille L. Baxter, librarian of the San Pedro High School in California, polled the faculty and found that Eliot’s ‘Silas Marner’ bored the most teachers the most.”

*in “Pleasures of Publishing”, Vol. XVII, No. 13, issue of July 3, 1950.

Now these frank revelations of how persons of obviously considerable literary experience react to "classics", though highly illuminating, is not (at least from the viewpoint of this book) very encouraging. It reveals a certain skepticism about classics but not in any way a mutiny against the critics who selected them nor a disapproval of their methods in doing so. On the contrary, the adverse opinions seem to be pronounced in somewhat the easy-going and tolerant manner that a husband might use when finding fault with his wife for making him put on his overshoes or for dragging him out in the evening to a lecture — that is, as if they were simply minor inconveniences in some otherwise admittedly beneficent institution — such as marriage.

Nowhere was objection made to the term "classics", nor any acknowledgement that such a thing as fatigue even existed. The particular classic in question somehow failed to do its duty of gratifying, for reasons unknown — that's all. They were perfectly satisfied to leave it thus unexplained.

Not only that, but there were also persons who strongly resented the implications of such a poll — on the ground that it was sacrilegious. "A boring classic is a contradiction in terms," one of them insisted. Another said: "No classic is boring. If it is boring it is not a classic". And so confidently did these enthusiasts take their stands on this dogma that they felt no need to make any conditions whatever as to whether these "impregnable" classics had been previously read three, ten or a hundred times, nor as to how recently the perusals had taken place. Presumably after finishing the last chapter the reader could start again at the beginning and still not feel the least weariness.

Am I wrong in estimating that at least hundreds of

thousands and perhaps millions of otherwise sensible men and women sincerely believe in the validity of this ridiculous notion that a classic is boredom proof. Why do they do so? For only one reason — that critics have taught it to them and are still teaching it to them. How else could it be supported? What goes on in the minds of critics that they are willing to allow monstrosities of this kind to permeate mankind and on *their* responsibility. With a few honest and sincere words they could squelch it within the year if it were not that secretly within their own bosoms they prefer to have it remain because it plays their game for them.

I can only say that the prevalence of such delusions demonstrates what a terrific clutch critics have taken about our throats, what a stupor of inability to reason they have already reduced us to, and how relentlessly they will strangle us to death unless we find some way to get free of them.

Even the author of the article himself — though evidently of an inquiring mind — declines to draw what would seem to be the obvious conclusions from the data he has accumulated — namely that there *are* no classics in the usually accepted meaning of the word. The weird freak of veracity he has dredged up from the depths instead of completely extinguishing any veneration he may ever have had for critics seems rather to have aroused a qualm that he has done something that might offend them.

“To try to state what the poll proved might be rushing in”, he says, “where *even critics** would fear to tread.”

Critics still seem to retain their status as experts, from his point of view. It never occurs to him that they don't

**italics mine.*

care in the least what happens to those who (as in his case) respect their opinions so long as they can satisfy their own vanities and fill their own pockets by the disseminating of those opinions. If their egotisms and pretensions force us into the mere oscillating between exhaustion and lassitude which is the natural outcome of the fanatic pursuit of a non-existent "ideal beauty", if they arbitrarily deny us the rest and invigoration which results from an indulgence of our own individual propensities on the ground that such indulgence leads only to chaos, whereas actually it leads simply to our liberation from their tyranny, why should they fret themselves about it. After all, the consequent chopping off of three, five or ten years from our life-expectancies might not be noticed and even if it were could hardly be charged against them in a world where the connection between art and longevity has not been acknowledged.

Let us not be blinded by the impersonality of the crime they have committed against us — by its resemblance merely to a careless enforcement of safety regulations or to parachuting the cholera germs on that unknown city twinkling below in the dark. Against the hatchet-man, the swindler, the light-fingered gentry we have the police, but against these casual and indiscriminating disseminators of death we have no organized defence whatever. Not only that, but how can we organize a defence against men who are our masters? Defence is not the word. Rebellion is the word. They must be overthrown by power — utterly, completely, irrevocably.

But to whom can we trust the administration of art, if not to them? To philosophers? They are too irresolute, remote. To the clergy? They are too intuitional, mystic. To artists? Intolerance and partisanship dominate their decisions. To educators, statesmen, mer-

chants? Again, no. All these types, useful though they may be, are suited only for subordinate posts in such a project. I propose to consign art to men in whose province it belongs as naturally and inevitably as boats to sailors — to doctors. If art's function is to prolong life then it's certainly logical to enlist the aid of men whose entire careers are devoted to that very intent. However, this mere aptness of occupation is not my main reason for selecting them. It's much more their objectivity, their singleness of purpose, their unhyprocrisy.

They devote themselves to their work with a concentration of endeavor which you find in no other vocation. The politician is always looking over his shoulder at something other than his main job. The author eyes the best-seller list; the reporter, his newspaper's policy; the industrialist, his social connections; the college president, his trustees' prejudices. But the medical man sticks strictly to business. Can you imagine him slanting a diagnosis merely to air a pungent paradox; assessing quinine as always better than aspirin; praising any remedy or technique as immortal? He has no such evangelical pretences. Individual aberrations, unusual allergies are not contemptuously pushed aside as "morbid". Unconventional behavior is never "bad taste" as it might be to the critic or social arbiter, nor "evil" as it might be to the moralist. If it requires treatment, he will dispense the treatment with no accompanying sanctimonious lectures whatever.

Perhaps his direct and admitted responsibility for the lives of his fellow men gives him a more careful approach than those who despite their having that same responsibility not only are ignorant of the fact but set up a nonsensical and impossible substitute goal with a fanfare and hoopla as revolting as the revival meeting,

but completely lacking the revival meeting's disarming unpretense of cogitative foundation.

That he is ignorant of art is an accusation which is only fractionally justified. He is an expert in some fields and a smatterer in others. That goes without saying — and is a charge that can be substantiated against anybody. Have you ever observed the complete vacuity with which the curator of the art museum responds to comments on the bravura or cadenza in music, or the architect's blank un-comprehension of the modes of the ballet? Art is too cosmic an affair for there to be any one universal connoisseur of it.

It's the romancings and vaporings about beauty which have set man off (as usual) on the wrong path — which have led him to believe that temperament, fervor, inspiration were the essentials for art rather than judgment, insight, wisdom. When he perceives that art as a whole depends so entirely on mere fatigue, when he perceives that the duration of an individual art work's art or beauty is contingent on the art work's degree of complexity, when he perceives that both fatigue and complexity are extremely practical and physical concepts which appertain as much to sports, railroading, manufacturing, and mathematics as they do to the fine arts — then art's affiliation to the medical profession becomes obvious.

Art of this scope needs specialists, true. The student of Elizabethan literature, the connoisseur of Italian primitive, the theologian, the astronomer, the engineer, even the art critic, (when he has freed himself of rustic moralities) can make useful contributions. But, as already said, men who are particularizers of this type are lacking in the panoramic viewpoint of life which is necessary for over-all supervision.

Although I have thus brought out the largeness of

art, that must not be interpreted as meaning that it is by any means large enough. It can and should be tremendously expanded *immediately*; and in this I am looking not to the normal growth which comes from the progress of civilization, so to speak, but to a release of that spontaneous generation which has been stunted and chained under the former mismanagement. The world has been far too rigid — far too obstructed with sharp corners and projecting impedimenta which the pedantic and fallacious doctrines of our previous leaders insisted upon retaining, like the clutter in the attic. The natural proclivity of man to revise, rub-up and revamp his everyday surroundings have been impeded and cramped by the exponents of solidity, permanence and perfectionism.

The hundred "best books" must be guarded from sacrilegious meddling, the "imperishable" masterpieces of music, painting, sculpture, must be fenced off and circumvallated like the crown jewels. The artists who created them were omnipotences; incapable of the least inadvertent slip, certain to turn each lineament of their work in the one, the only, the transcendent mold. No synonym could possibly be substituted for even one of the god-given words in Milton, Hugo or Pater; the "jackanapes" who had the insolence to compose succeeding movements to Schubert's Unfinished Symphony, was not venturing an amiable gesture but betraying man's inheritance of beauty.

The effect of all these inhibitions is to leave unfilled interstices in our art structure, as there are in a bag of potatoes, or as if art's units were adamantine boulders tossed in scattered heaps by a cataclysm of nature — never to be budged. Suppose there is an emotional gap between Prokofieff's Love For Three Oranges and Stravinsky's Fire Bird; must we leave a perpetual vacuum

there? Why not fill the void with emanations and diversities from each? Change Valse Triste to a polka, a Mozart minuet to a funeral march. Repaint Blue Boy, in red, mauve or orange. Let us tone and permutate our works of art in relation to the person who is to be given perception of them, even as we might dilute a potion or modify a prescription according to the needs of the patient. Re-write Vanity Fair and Madame Bovary down to the flibbertigibbet who couldn't make high school. Why agonize her with subtleties beyond her mentality! It's by no means certain that eliminating the slow-witted furthers general human health. They frequently propagate children of amazing intellectuality. Tire the unintelligent with a flood of "trashy" novels, "inept" moving pictures, "paltry" radio programs; that's what pushes them towards intelligence. Else, if even that flood doesn't fatigue them, why should they stir? When they do tire, may the more complex perceptions be made available to them. That's the problem of distribution, as I have already said. Only the quack doctors of art, with their talk of perfectionism, advocate putting all mankind on one diet.

Complex art works must be introduced to man in approximately the order of their complexity. To subject young people to a solid diet of "good music" — that is, of the complex music of Bach, Beethoven and Wagner, and so on — without an introductory course in "popular music" may eventually succeed in its purpose, just as it is possible, by extra study and effort, to master long division without any preliminary training in short division, but it is not an intelligent and efficient procedure.

Once art's purely hygienic purpose is completely felt, how the inane bickerings which now frustrate its accomplishments will vanish.

The present lamentable endeavors to establish "standards" that will soothe and humor our star-gazers, then to modify them for each branch of art — such ones for literature, others for music and painting — next to discard them and start over again when the new decade or century — or a creative artist of genius — explodes them; these inconsistencies and irresolutions of effort are abandoned. Dissonance in music no longer need be warranted by sham mathematical formulae; "modernism" in painting ceases to require justification as "higher truth"; pictures will no more be required to have meaning or render explanation; adventurous experiments in drama or poetry do not have to disprove their "decadence" or "abnormality". Any such obligation ceases. If these modes produce a new flavor they have achieved their purpose. All art works — even the greatest — are *flavors*; complex flavors of which we tire slowly, or simple flavors of which we tire rapidly. There is no other duty required of them than to cause exactly that widening of our emotional repertory. As for flavors of art which might be considered "evil" — crimes, for example, or public hangings, or narcotic addictions, or obscene spectacles or indecent books — I do not think there need be any fear from these sources while we are operating under a policy of longevitism and with the advice of doctors. A less hypocritical attitude towards pleasure might gradually become current, true; and there might occur considerable alterations of usage and custom; but a greater taking care of man's health can hardly be imagined as likely to undermine his morals. Expansion is what we must strive for. Platitudinous art critics are our enemies, with their nostrums of perfection, their mousetraps to snare the will-o-the-wisp, their puerile taboos and idolatries, their chains on our imaginations. Ride them

down; and then race for your life towards the new, the untasted, the untired-of.

The doctor needs no education to lead and animate this spirit of art. He is already committed and predestined to it. Trends therewards are now under way. It's we who need the education, that we may learn to be guided by him.

I can see no significant alteration of outlook that he need make. There would be extensions and advances, but only in the same direction that his movements have already taken. In fact the only decisive act which would be required of him would be to avow openly a doctrine that I imagine he has long secretly held — namely, that man is ill in every moment of his life, from birth to death, and not merely during those relatively short periods when certain obtrusively obvious symptoms, to which we have given such names as measles, the grippe, pneumonia and the like, have pushed themselves to the fore. Diseases of this type perhaps furnish the more theatrical occasion for the exercise of his skill, but their effect on health has been absurdly exaggerated. That the ten days a year, perhaps, during which a man is affected by these dramatizations of illness could possibly affect his longevity as much as the three hundred and fifty-five days during which he is usually — but erroneously — considered to be in good health, is as ridiculous as to believe that a flat tire or bent fender determine the eventual mileage obtainable from an automobile rather than intelligent precautions in day-to-day driving.

It is not man's vital organs that betray him — although they are the culprits upon whom he customarily places the blame. His heart, his liver, his lungs, his arteries can function for immeasurably longer periods than they now do — if he will give them proper support and

encouragement. The medical profession is well aware of this fact and has repeatedly proved it by actual experiment. It is his will to live that collapses; and then drags down his physical organism with it to an unnecessary end. You perceive the symptoms of this disease not in the sick room or hospital, but on the streets, in the offices, in all the places which humanity frequents. It discloses itself in lethargy, inertia, repletion. Its victims are those men and women who are usually spoken of as "settled"; and are indulged in their misfortune by being praised for dependability and honesty. They are perfect as night watchmen, as nurse-girls, as chap-erones, as auditors, as censors — in fact in any occupation for which the qualifications are to sit tight and not get ideas. Even relatively young men — that is, men who are young in years rather than in energy — may catch the sickness — and often do — as shown by their equanimity in entering vocations and trades from which nothing may be derived but the elements of existence. They are persons to whom the menu of life has gone flat; who foresee for the remainder of their lives nothing but a rehashing of old dishes — and who lack the capacity to do anything about it.

Is it necessary to emphasize how numerous are the sufferers from this ailment? We encounter them on all sides of us, as thickly as mere objects of nature, yet still going through the motions of animation — becoming obese from sheer boredom, commuting like automatons between what they call "home" and what they call "work", performing that which is expected of them with a certain obtuse and dutiful efficiency, but leaving completely undeveloped — and even unexplored — great areas of their nervous systems — areas which, if given activation would stir them out of their apathy, bring

them again those contrasting raptures and dejections which are the distinguishing mark of youth, invigorate every function of body and mind and give them a new grasp on life.

Must we concede that these persons are themselves willing their own early deaths? Perhaps. But by no means does this excuse those of their fellow men (named critics) who have been callously and treacherously encouraging their suicides and premature senilities by inculcating them with fallacious sentimentalities — who have been deliberately feeding them the germs of their disease with one hand while hypocritically smoothing their brows with the other.

No matter how torpid and numbed these psychological invalids may be it seems hard to believe that their condition is hopeless. After all, the essential step for a cure is merely to cease glorifying themselves for their own "good sense", for their "resistance to temptation", for their "peace of mind"; recognize the fact that they are victims of an extremely insidious disease and consult their doctor as to the proper treatment.

Medicaments, laboratory research, surgery, and sick-room techniques are by no means reduced in importance for the type of doctor I envisage in this modern world, but they are immensely supplemented by other activities.

His theatre of operation would include every phase of life, large or small, from the fine arts to buying a new dress, from the secret love affair to a canary for the living room.

One of his main problems would be the determining of what pains are therapeutically worth enduring for the sake of the future pleasures they might promote, and what ones (like White-Feather Aesthetics) lead merely into blind alleys. Obviously this is not always easy. There

are perhaps relatively simple cases. To educate children in the Basque, Lettish and Choctaw languages would seem decidedly inexpedient even for Basques, Letts and Choctaws — because of the obvious literary and communicative limitations. To teach fourteenth century English to them in order that they might fully comprehend the Canterbury Tales would seem at least of doubtful value. Or to take a hypothetical case: if you concede that my previously discussed campaign to cause the creation of close approximation to Hamlet had been highly successful, then to *insist* that men make a special effort to read Hamlet would be inadvisable, because the probabilities would be that they had already obtained a sufficiency of the flavors that emanate from Hamlet through other sources — namely through books very much *like* Hamlet. Manifestly the problem would soon “relativize” itself — just as Factual Aesthetics tends to do — and require that decisions, to produce best results, should be made according to the temperaments, mentalities and fatigue patterns of the individual.

Novel ventures in painting, music, poetry, architecture would be vital instrumentalities in the treatment of the doctor's patients. So would the newspaper and a visit to the aquarium. Exciting new books, plays, sports events, radio programs would at once find places among his tonics and recipes.

Distributive failures would trouble him even more than shortages in the blood bank. Unsatisfactory translations of Balzac, Proust or Chekhov; delays in the recording of certain musical compositions and excessive reiteration of others; inadequately stocked public libraries; censorship if based on any consideration except bodily soundness; tyrannies of minorities over majorities or vice versa, would be matters requiring prompt remedial measures.

Prolonged arid periods in the drama of existence would at once bring emergency conferences. Life's showmen to the rescue! Some incredible invention of science would be requisitioned, a stupendous world fair, new departures in painting, music and literature, an international prize contest for the antithesis to precedent; anything to shake the world out of its doldrums.

In short, the physician would be at the forefront of a large part of human action. Business men, lawyers, statesmen, jurists, artists, educators, philosophers, economists — even art critics — would be his advisers and assistants. A verdict of the supreme court might be reached on the basis of long-range hygienity; so might the question of a new subway, the publication of an encyclopaedia, tariff rates, propaganda, marriage, divorce, birth control.

However, let me not be drawn into an orgy of rhapsodizing or speculation. I don't intend to convert this book into a manual of longevity. Instead, let me express in my few remaining paragraphs a thought which seems to summarize the book's main purpose.

The difference between art works, as I have already said, is not in their potential pleasure-giving capacity but in the degree of their resistance to reiteration. That first glimpse of the completely calm and motionless ocean, may amaze one with its beauty, but it is a beauty of concentration and simplicity — completely repetitious. Each course that the eye may take produces a duplication of feeling. On the other hand, that tremendous panorama which awes one from the summit of Mount Rigi, what immense prolongings of enjoyment are made possible by the myriad changing vistas in every direction! Of either emotion man eventually tires — but how much more rapidly of one than the other.

A man's own life — the series of all the sensations he brings to himself from birth to death — is clearly just another such art work as these two. It's the art work he creates for his own life-preservation. If it is uncomplex, crude, narrow, confined, then death brings him an early release from the gathering fatigue of sensing it. On the other hand, if it is diverging, free, spacious, if in its creation he has expanded his being into a vast empire of appreciation and understanding, if his every nerve-cell and fibre is vibrant and atingle with capacity to feel, if every object in the cosmos can be understood in its complexities as well as its simplicities, according to his will to see it one way or the other, if sound can be either sound or a symphony, color either color or the art of painting, love either a sensuality or a virtue or both, money important or unimportant, joy either the end or beginning of pain, vulgarity a fault or an inheritance, nationality and religion either prides or accidents, anything its opposite, if low can be high, white black; and if he can slant and direct these myriad feelings to those zones of his entity where hunger grasps them as ambrosia and away from those where fatigue repels them as death, and if he can bequeath this power to his sons and sons' sons, from generation to generation, then man may prolong his life to an extent which, if I should venture to make an estimate of it now — even considering the remarkable advance we have made in the last fifty years — would seem unbelievable.



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WAR ON CRITICS

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by Theodore L. Shaw

Author of ART RECONSTRUCTED and
ART'S ENDURANCE

A war is a war and cannot be waged in philosophic calm. This book reveals the tense and bitter conflict which at once arises between the man of skeptical mind and the critic who wishes to maintain his traditional pose as an expert delivering verdicts on the authority of good taste.

Not only does the author question the critic's good taste but even his honesty. The critic is presented to us, in fact, as an *aesthetic criminal*, thoroughly aware of the fraudulence of his occupation, deliberately deceiving us with statements he does not himself believe, and obstructing rather than encouraging art and the artist in their natural aims.

Though the charges are both vehement and caustic they are by no means reckless. Examples and substantiations of them are plentifully supplied and the reader, whether he is for or against critics — or is one himself — is compelled to acknowledge that critics — including even the best of them — have asked for just such a book as this by their own extravagances and irresponsibilities.

However there is much more than mere invective and contention in WAR ON CRITICS. It strongly rejects the defeatist excuse that the situation is incurable. No new aesthetic dogmas nor standards are suggested — quite the contrary — but a modern policy of freedom and initiative is proposed which is surprising both from its simplicity and originality. And among the most interesting chapters are those in which the helpful consequences to criticism itself, to the creative artist and to man in general are set forth.

Any person interested in the arts, either as professional or amateur, teacher or student, will find both information and enjoyment in this stimulating volume.

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